

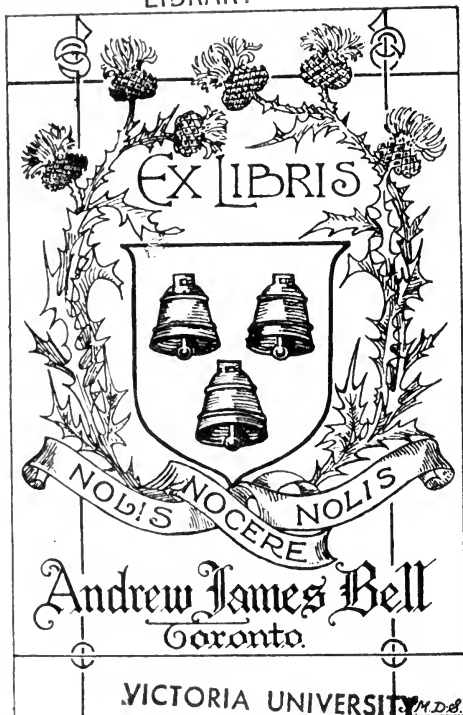
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HISTORY OF ENGLISH HUMOUR.

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VOL. II.



# HISTORY OF ENGLISH HUMOUR

WITH AN

INTRODUCTION UPON ANCIENT HUMOUR.

BY THE

REV. A. G. L'ESTRANGE,

AUTHOR OF

“THE LIFE OF THE REV. WILLIAM HARNESS,”

“FROM THE THAMES TO THE TAMAR,”

ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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# HISTORY OF ENGLISH HUMOUR.

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## CHAPTER I.

Burlesque—Parody—The “Splendid Shilling”—Prior—  
Pope—Ambrose Philips—Parodies of Gray’s Elegy—Gay.

**B**URLESQUE, that is comic imitation, comprises parody and caricature. The latter is a valuable addition to humorous narrative, as we see in the sketches of Gillray, Cruikshank and others. By itself it is not sufficiently suggestive and affords no story or conversation. Hence in the old caricatures the speeches of the characters were written in balloons over their heads, and in the modern an explanation is added underneath. For want of such assistance we lose the greater part of the humour in Hogarth’s paintings.

We may date the revival of Parody from the fifteenth century, although Dr. Johnson speaks as though it originated with Philips. Notwithstanding the great scope it affords for humorous invention, it has never become popular, nor formed an important branch of

literature; perhaps, because the talent of the parodist always suffered from juxtaposition with that of his original. In its widest sense parody is little more than imitation, but as we should not recognise any resemblance without the use of the same form, it always implies a similarity in words or style. Sometimes the thoughts are also reproduced, but this is not sufficient, and might merely constitute a summary or translation. The closer the copy the better the parody, as where Pope's lines

"Here shall the spring its earliest sweets bestow  
Here the first roses of the year shall blow,"

were applied by Catherine Fanshawe to the Regent's Park with a very slight change—

"Here shall the spring its earliest coughs bestow,  
Here the first noses of the year shall blow."

But all parody is not travesty, for a writing may be parodied without being ridiculed. This was notably the case in the Centones,\* Scripture histories in the phraseology of Homer and Virgil, which were written by the Christians in the fourth century, in order that they might be able to teach at once classics and religion. From the pious object for which they were first designed, they degenerated into fashionable exercises of ingenuity, and thus we find the

\* Properly Centrones, from a Greek word signifying patchwork.

Emperor Valentinian composing some on marriage, and requesting, or rather commanding Ausonius to contend with him in such compositions. They were regarded as works of fancy—a sort of literary embroidery.

It may be questioned whether any of these parodies were intended to possess humour; but wherever we find such as have any traces of it, we may conclude that the imitation has been adopted to increase it. This does not necessarily amount to travesty, for the object is not always to throw contempt on the original. Thus, we cannot suppose “The Battle of the Frogs and Mice,” or “The Banquet of Matron,”\* although written in imitation of the heroic poetry of Homer, was intended to make “The Iliad” appear ridiculous, but rather that the authors thought to make their conceits more amusing, by comparing what was most insignificant with something of unsurpassable grandeur. The desire to gain influence from the prescriptive forms of great writings was the first incentive to parody. We cannot suppose that Luther intended to be profane when he imitated the first psalm—

“Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the way of

---

\* In which the various kinds of fish are introduced in mock heroic verse. It dates from the fifth century B.C.

the Sacramentarians, not sat in the seat of the Zuinglians, or followed the counsel of the Zurichers."

Probably Ben Jonson saw nothing objectionable in the quaintlywhimsical lines in Cynthia's Revels—

*Amo.* From Spanish shrugs, French faces, smirks, irps, and all affected humours.

*Chorus.* Good Mercury defend ns.

*Pha.* From secret friends, sweet servants, loves, doves, and such fantastique humours.

*Chorus.* Good Mercury defend us.

The same charitable allowance may be conceded to the songs composed by the Cavaliers in the Civil War. We should not be surprised to find a tone of levity in them, but they were certainly not intended to throw any discredit on our Church. In "The Rump, or an exact collection of the choicest poems and songs relating to the late times from 1639" we have "A Litany for the New Year," of which the following will serve as a specimen—

"From Rumps, that do rule against customes and laws  
From a fardle of fancies stiled a good old cause,  
From wives that have nails that are sharper than claws,  
Good Jove deliver us."

Among the curious tracts collected by Lord Somers we find a "New Testament of our Lords and Saviours, the House of our Lords and Saviours, the House of Commons, and the Supreme Council at Windsor." It gives "The Genealogy of the Parliament from the year

1640 to 1648, and commences "The Book of the Generation of Charles Pim, the son of Judas, the son of Beelzebub," and goes on to state in the thirteenth verse that "King Charles being a just man, and not willing to have the people ruined, was minded to dissolve them, (the Parliament), but while he thought on these things," &c.,

Of the same kind was the parody of Charles Hanbury Williams at the commencement of the last century, "Old England's Te Deum"—the character of which may be conjectured from the first line

"We complain of Thee, O King, we acknowledge thee to be a Hanoverian."

Sometimes parodies of this kind had even a religious object, as when Dr. John Boys, Dean of Canterbury in the reign of James I., in his zeal, untempered with wisdom, attacked the Romanists by delivering a form of prayer from the pulpit commencing—

"Our Pope which art in Rome, cursed be thy name,"  
and ending,

"For thine is the infernal pitch and sulphur for ever and ever. Amen."

"The Religious Recruiting Bill" was written with a pious intention, as was also the Catechism

by Mr. Toplady, a clergyman, aimed at throwing contempt upon Lord Chesterfield's code of morality. It is almost impossible to draw a hard and fast line between travesty and harmless parody—the feelings of the public being the safest guide. But to associate Religion with anything low is offensive, even if the object in view be commendable.

Some parodies of Scripture are evidently not intended to detract from its sanctity, as, for instance, the attack upon sceptical philosophy which lately appeared in an American paper, pretending to be the commencement of a new Bible "suited to the enlightenment of the age," and beginning—

"Primarily the unknowable moved upon kosmos and evolved protoplasm.

"And protoplasm was inorganic and undifferentiated, containing all things in potential energy: and a spirit of evolution moved upon the fluid mass.

"And atoms caused other atoms to attract: and their contact begat light, heat, and electricity.

"And the unconditioned differentiated the atoms, each after its kind and their combination begat rocks, air, and water.

"And there went out a spirit of evolution and working in protoplasm by accretion and absorption produced the organic cell.

"And the cell by nutrition evolved primordial germ, and germ devolved protogene, and protogene begat eozoon and eozoon begat monad and monad begot animalcule. . . ."

We are at first somewhat at a loss to understand what made the "Splendid Shilling" so celebrated: it is called by Steele the finest burlesque in the English language. Although

far from being, as Dr. Johnson asserts, the first parody, it is undoubtedly a work of talent, and was more appreciated in 1703 than it can be now, being recognised as an imitation of Milton's poems which were then becoming celebrated.\* Reading it at the present day, we should scarcely recognise any parody; but blank verse was at that time uncommon, although the Italians were beginning to protest against the gothic barbarity of rhyme, and Surrey had given in his translation of the first and fourth books of Virgil a specimen of the freer versification.

Meres says that "Piers Plowman was the first that observed the true quality of our verse without the curiositie of rime" but he was not followed.

The new character of the "Splendid Shilling" caused it to bring more fame to its author than has been gained by any other work so short and simple. It was no doubt an inspiration of the moment, and was written by John Philips at the age of twenty. There is considerable freshness and strength in the poem, which commences—

"Happy the man, who void of cares and strife  
In silken or in leathern purse retains

---

\* About this time Addison and Bishop Attenbury first called attention to the beauties of Milton.

A splendid shilling: he nor hears with pain  
New oysters cried, nor sighs for cheerful ale;  
But with his friends, when nightly mists arise  
To Juniper's Magpie or Town Hall\* repairs.  
Meanwhile he smokes and laughs at merry tale,  
Or pun ambiguous or conumdrum quaint;  
But I, whom griping penury surrounds,  
And hunger sure attendant upon want,  
With scanty offals, and small acid tiff  
(Wretched repast!) my meagre corps sustain:  
Then solitary walk or doze at home  
In garret vile, and with a warming puff.  
Regale chilled fingers, or from tube as black  
As winter chimney, or well polished jet  
Exhale mundungus, ill-perfuming scent."

He goes on to relate how he is besieged by duns, and what a chasm there is in his "galligaskins." He wrote very little altogether, but produced a piece called "Blenheim," and a sort of Georgic entitled "Cyder."

Prior, like many other celebrated men, partly owed his advancement to an accidental circumstance. He was brought up at his uncle's tavern "The Rummer," situate at Charing Cross—then a kind of country suburb of the city, and adjacent to the riverside mansions and ornamental gardens of the nobility. To this convenient inn the neighbouring magnates were wont to resort, and one day in accordance with the classic proclivities of the times, a hot dispute arose among them about the rendering of a passage in Horace. One of those present said

\* Ale-houses at Oxford.



that as they could not settle the question, they had better ask young Prior, who then was attending Westminster School. He had made good use of his opportunities, and answered the question so satisfactorily that Lord Dorset there and then undertook to send him to Cambridge. He became a fellow of St. John's, and Lord Dorset afterwards introduced him at Court, and obtained for him the post of secretary of Legation at the Hague, in which office he gave so much satisfaction to William III. that he made him one of his gentlemen of the bed-chamber. He became afterwards Secretary of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Ambassador in France, and Under Secretary of State.

During his two year's imprisonment by the Whigs on a charge of high treason—from which he was liberated without a trial—he prepared a collection of his works, for which he obtained a large sum of money. He then retired from office, but died shortly afterwards in his fifty-eighth year.

Prior is remarkable for his exquisite lightness and elegance of style, well suited to the pretty classical affectations of the day. He delights in cupids, nymphs, and flowers. In two or three places, perhaps, he verges upon indelicacy, but conceals it so well among feathers and

rose leaves, that we may half pardon it. Although always sprightly he is not often actually humorous, but we may quote the following advice to a husband from the "English Padlock"

"Be to her virtues very kind,  
And to her faults a little blind,  
Let all her ways be unconfined,  
And clap your padlock on her mind."

"Yes; ev'ry poet is a fool;  
By demonstration Ned can show it;  
Happy could Ned's inverted rule,  
Prove ev'ry fool to be a poet."

"How old may Phyllis be, you ask,  
Whose beauty thus all hearts engages?  
To answer is no easy task,  
For she has really two ages.

"Stiff in brocade and pinched in stays,  
Her patches, paint, and jewels on:  
All day let envy view her face,  
And Phyllis is but twenty-one.

"Paint, patches, jewels, laid aside,  
At night astronomers agree,  
The evening has the day belied,  
And Phyllis is some forty-three."

"Helen was just slipt from bed,  
Her eyebrows on the toilet lay,  
Away the kitten with them fled,  
As fees belonging to her prey."

"For this misfortune, careless Jane,  
Assure yourself, was soundly rated:  
And Madam getting up again,  
With her own hand the mouse-trap baited.

"On little things as sages write,  
Depends our human joy or sorrow;  
If we don't catch a mouse to-night,  
Alas! no eyebrows for to-morrow."

He wrote the following impromptu epitaph on himself—

---

“ Nobles and heralds by your leave,  
Here lies what once was Matthew Prior,  
The son of Adam and of Eve,  
Can Bourbon or Nassau go higher.”

But he does not often descend to so much levity as this, his wing is generally in a higher atmosphere. Sir Walter Scott observes that in the powers of approaching and touching the finer feelings of the heart, he has never been excelled, if indeed he has ever been equalled.

Prior wrote a parody called “ Erle Robert’s Mice,” but Pope is more prolific than any other poet in such productions. His earlier taste seems to have been for imitation, and he wrote good parodies on Waller and Cowley, and a bad travesty on Spencer. “ January and May ” and “ The Wife of Bath ” are founded upon Chaucer’s Tales. Pope did not generally indulge in travesty, his object was not to ridicule his original, but rather to assist himself by borrowing its style. His productions are the best examples of parodies in this latter and better sense. Thus, he thought to give a classic air to his satires on the foibles of his time by arranging them upon the models of those of Horace. In his imitation of the second Satire of the second Book we have—

“ He knows to live who keeps the middle state,  
And neither leans on this side nor on that,  
Nor stops for one bad cork his butler’s pay,  
Swears, like Albutius, a good cook away,  
Nor lets, like Nævius, every error pass,  
The musty wine, foul cloth, or greasy glass.”

There is a slight amount of humour in these adaptations, and it seems to have been congenial to the poets mind. Generally he was more turned to philosophy, and the slow measures he adopted were more suited to the dignified and pompous, than to the playful and gay. Occasionally, however, there is some sparkle in his lines, and, we read in "The Rape of the Lock"—

"Now love suspends his golden scales in air,  
Weighs the men's wits against the lady's hair,  
The doubtful beam long nods from side to side,  
At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside."

Again, his friend Mrs. Blount found London rather dull than gay—

"She went to plain work and to purling brooks,  
Old-fashioned halls, dull aunts, and croaking rooks,  
She went from opera, park, assembly, play,  
To morning walks and prayers three hours a day,  
To part her time 'twixt reading and bohea,  
To muse and spill her solitary tea,  
Or o'er cold coffee trifle with a spoon,  
Count the slow clock, and dine exact at noon,  
Divert her eyes with pictures in the fire,  
Hum half a tune, tell stories to the Squire,  
Up to her Godly garret after seven,  
There starve and pray—for that's the way to Heaven."

He was seldom able to bring a humorous sketch to the close without something a little objectionable. Often inclined to err on the side of severity, he was one of those instances in which we find acrimonious feeling associated with physical infirmity. "The Dunciad" is the

principal example of this, but we have many others—such as the epigram :

“ You beat your pate and fancy wit will come,  
Knock as you please, there's nobody at home.”

At one time he was constantly extolling the charms of Lady Wortley Montagu in every strain of excessive adulation. He wrote sonnets upon her, and told her she had robbed the whole tree of knowledge. But when the ungrateful fair rejected her little crooked admirer, he completely changed his tone, and descended to lampoon of this kind—

“ Lady Mary said to me, and in her own house,  
I do not care for you three skips of a louse ;  
I forgive the dear creature for what she has said,  
For ladies will talk of what runs in their head.”

He is supposed to have attacked Addison under the name of Atticus. He says that “like the Turk he would bear no brother near the throne,” but that he would

“ View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,  
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise,  
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
And with our sneering teach the rest to sneer ;  
Willing to wound and yet afraid to strike,  
Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike,  
Alike reserved to blame or to commend,  
A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend,  
Dreading e'en fools, by flatterers besieged,  
And so obleeping that he ne'er obleeped.”

Pope at first praised Ambrose Philips, and said he was “a man who could write very nobly,” but afterwards they became rivals, and things went so far between them that Pope called

Philips "a rascal," and Philips hung up a rod with which he said he would chastise Pope. He probably had recourse to this kind of argument, because he felt that he was worsted by his adversary in wordy warfare, having little talent in satire. In fact, his attempts in this direction were particularly clumsy as—"On a company of bad dancers to good music."

"How ill the motion with the music suits!  
So Orpheus fiddled, and so danced the brutes."

Still there is a gaiety and lightness about many of his pieces. The following is a specimen of his favourite style. Italian singers, lately introduced, seem to have been regarded by many with disfavour and alarm.

TO SIGNORA CUZZONI.

"Little syren of the stage,  
Charmer of an idle age,  
Empty warbler, breathing lyre,  
Wanton gale of fond desire,  
Bane of every manly art,  
Sweet enfeebler of the heart;  
O! too pleasing is thy strain,  
Hence, to southern climes again,  
Tuneful mischief, vocal spell,  
To this island bid farewell,  
Leave us, as we ought to be,  
Leave the Britons rough and free."

To parody a work is to pay it a compliment, though perhaps unintentionally, for if it were not well known the point of the imitation would be lost. Thus, the general appreciation of Gray's "Elegy" called forth several

humorous parodies of it about the middle of the last century. The following is taken from one by the Rev. J. Duncombe, Vicar of Bishop Ridley's old church at Herne in Kent. It is entitled "An Evening Contemplation in a College."

- "The curfew tolls the hour of closing gates,  
With jarring sound the porter turns the key,  
Then in his dreamy mansion, slumbering waits,  
And slowly, sternly quits it—though for me.
- "Now shine the spires beneath the paly moon,  
And through the cloister peace and silence reign,  
Save where some fiddler scrapes a drowsy tune,  
Or copious bowls inspire a jovial strain.
- "Save that in yonder cobweb-mantled room,  
Where lies a student in profound repose,  
Oppressed with ale; wide echoes through the gloom,  
The droning music of his vocal nose.
- "Within those walls, where through the glimmering shade,  
Appear the pamphlets in a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow bed till morning laid,  
The peaceful fellows of the college sleep.
- "The tinkling bell proclaiming early prayers,  
The noisy servants rattling o'er their head,  
The calls of business and domestic cares,  
Ne'er rouse these sleepers from their drowsy bed.
- "No chattering females crowd the social fire,  
No dread have they of discord and of strife,  
Unknown the names of husband and of sire,  
Unfelt the plagues of matrimonial life.
- "Oft have they basked along the sunny walls,  
Oft have the benches bowed beneath their weight,  
How jocund are their looks when dinner calls!  
How smoke the cutlets on their crowded plate!
- "Oh! let not Temperance too disdainful hear  
How long their feasts, how long their dinners last;  
Nor let the fair with a contemptuous sneer,  
On these unmarried men reflections cast.
- . . . . .

"Far from the giddy town's tumultuous strife,  
Their wishes yet have never learned to stray,  
Content and happy in a single life,  
They keep the noiseless tenor of their way.

"E'en now their books, from cobwebs to protect,  
Inclosed by door of glass, in Doric style,  
On polished pillars raised with bronzes decked,  
Demand the passing tribute of a smile."

Another parody of this famous Elegy published about the same date, has a less pleasant subject—the dangers and vices of the metropolis. It speaks of the activity of thieves.

"Oft to their subtlety the fob did yield,  
Their cunning oft the pocket string hath broke,  
How in dark alleys bludgeons did they wield!  
How bowed the victim 'neath their sturdy stroke!

"Let not ambition mock their humble toil,  
Their vulgar crimes and villainy obscure;  
Nor rich rogues hear with a disdainful smile,  
The low and petty knaveries of the poor.

"Beneath the gibbet's self perhaps is laid,  
Some heart once pregnant with infernal fire,  
Hands that the sword of Nero might have swayed,  
And midst the carnage tuned the exulting lyre.

"Ambition to their eyes her ample page  
Rich with such monstrous crimes did ne'er unroll,  
Chill penury repressed their native rage,  
And froze the bloody current of their soul.

"Full many a youth, fit for each horrid scene,  
The dark and sooty flues of chimneys bear;  
Full many a rogue is born to cheat unseen,  
And dies unchanged for want of proper care."

Gay dedicated his first poem to Pope, then himself a young man, and this led to an intimacy between them. In 1712 he held the office of Secretary to Ann, Duchess of Monmouth; and in 1714 he accompanied the Earl



of Clarendon to Hanover. In this year he wrote a good travesty of Ambrose Philips' pastoral poetry, of which the following is a specimen—

*Lobbin Clout.* As Blouzelinda, in a gamesome mood,  
Behind a hayrick loudly laughing stood,  
I slily ran and snatched a hasty kiss;  
She wiped her lips, nor took it much amiss.  
Believe me, Cuddy, while I'm bold to say,  
Her breath was sweeter than the ripened hay.

*Cuddy.* As my Buxoma in a morning fair,  
With gentle finger stroked her milky care,  
I quaintly stole a kiss; at first, 'tis true,  
She frowned, yet after granted one or two.  
Lobbin, I swear, believe who will my vow,  
Her breath by far excelled the breathing cow.

*Lobbin.* Leek to the Welsh, to Dutchmen butter's dear,  
Of Irish swains potato is the cheer,  
Oats for their feasts the Scottish shepherds grind,  
Sweet turnips are the food of Blouzelind;  
While she loves turnips, butter I'll despise,  
Nor leeks, nor oatmeal, nor potato prize.

*Cuddy.* In good roast beef my landlord sticks his knife,  
And capon fat delights his dainty wife;  
Pudding our parson eats, the squire loves hare,  
But white-pot thick is my Buxoma's fare;  
While she loves white-pot, capon ne'er shall be  
Nor hare, nor beef, nor pudding, food for me.

The following is not without point at the present day—

TO A LADY ON HER PASSION FOR OLD CHINA.

What ecstasies her bosom fire!  
How her eyes languish with desire!  
How blessed, how happy, should I be,  
Were that fond glance bestowed on me!  
New doubts and fears within me war,  
What rival's here? A China jar!  
China's the passion of her soul,  
A cup, a plate, a dish, a bowl,  
Can kindle wishes in her breast,  
Inflame with joy, or break her rest.

Husbands more covetous than sage,  
 Condemn this China-buying rage,  
 They count that woman's prudence little,  
 Who sets her heart on things so brittle;  
 But are those wise men's inclinations  
 Fixed on more strong, more sure foundations?  
 If all that's frail we must despise,  
 No human view or scheme is wise.

Gay's humour is often injured by the introduction of low scenes, and disreputable accompaniments.

"The Dumps," a lament of a forlorn damsel, is much in the same style as the Pastorals. It finishes with these lines—

"Farewell ye woods, ye meads, ye streams that flow,  
 A sudden death shall rid me of my woe,  
 This penknife keen my windpipe shall divide,  
 What, shall I fall as squeaking pigs have died?  
 No—to some tree this carcase I'll suspend;  
 But worrying curs find such untimely end!  
 I'll speed me to the pond, where the high stool,  
 On the long plank hangs o'er the muddy pool,  
 That stool, the dread of every scolding queen:  
 Yet sure a lover should not die, so mean!  
 Thus placed aloft I'll rave and rail by fits,  
 Though all the parish say I've lost my wits;  
 And thence, if courage holds, myself I'll throw,  
 And quench my passion in the lake below."

He published in 1727 "The Beggar's Opera," the idea had been suggested by Swift. This is said to have given birth to the English Opera—the Italian having been already introduced here. This opera, or musical play, brought out by Mr. Rich, was so remunerative that it was a common saying that it made "Rich gay, and Gay rich."

In "The Beggar's Opera" the humour turns

on Polly falling in love with a highwayman. Peachum gives an amusing account of the gang. Among them is Harry Paddington—"a poor, petty-larceny rascal, without the least genius; that fellow, though he were to live these six months would never come to the gallows with any credit—and Tom Tipple, a guzzling, soaking sot, who is always too drunk to stand, or make others stand. A cart is absolutely necessary for him." Peachum, and his wife lament over their daughter Polly's choice of Captain Macheath. There are numerous songs, such as that of Mrs. Peachum beginning—

"Our Polly is a sad slut! nor heeds what we have taught her,  
I wonder any man alive will ever rear a daughter."

Polly, contemplating the possibility of Macheath's being hanged exclaims—

"Now, I'm a wretch indeed. Methinks, I see him already in the cart, sweeter and more lovely than the nose-gay in his hand! I hear the crowd extolling his resolution and intrepidity! What volleys of sighs are sent down from the windows of Holborn, that so comely a youth should be brought to disgrace. I see him at the tree! the whole circle are in tears! even butchers weep! Jack Ketch himself hesitates to perform his duty, and would be glad to lose his fee by a reprieve. What then will become of Polly?"

### To Macheath

Were you sentenced to transportation, sure, my dear, you could not leave me behind you?

*Mac.* Is there any power, any force, that could tear thee from me. You might sooner tear a pension out of the hands of a courtier, a fee from a lawyer, a pretty woman from a looking-glass, or any woman from quadrille.\*

Gay may have taken his idea of writing fables from Dryden whose classical reading tempted him in two or three instances to indulge in such fancies. They were clever, and in childhood appeared humorous to us, but we have long ceased to be amused by them, owing to their excessive improbability. Such ingenuity seems misplaced, we see more absurdity than talent in representing a sheep as talking to a wolf. To us fables now present, not what is strange and difficult of comprehension, but mentally fanciful folly. In some few instances in La Fontaine and Gay, the wisdom of the lessons atones for the strangeness of their garb, and the peculiarity of the *dramatis personæ* may tend to rivet them in our minds. There is something also fresh and pleasant in the scenes of country life which they bring before us. But the taste for such conceits is irrevocably gone, and every attempt to revive it, even when recommended by such ingenuity and talent as that of Owen Meredith, only tends to prove the fact more incontestably.

\* A game at cards.

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In Russia, a younger nation than ours, the fables of Kriloff had a considerable sale at the beginning of this century, but they had a political meaning.

## CHAPTER II.

Defoe—Irony—Ode to the Pillory—The “Comical Pilgrim”—The “Scandalous Club”—Humorous Periodicals—Heraclitus Ridens—The London Spy—The British Apollo.

DEFOE was born in 1663, and was the son of a butcher in St. Giles'. He first distinguished himself by writing in 1699 a poetical satire entitled “The True Born Englishman,” in honour of King William and the Dutch, and in derision of the nobility of this country, who did not much appreciate the foreign court. The poem abounded with rough and rude sarcasm. After giving an uncomplimentary description of the English, he proceeds to trace their descent—

“These are the heroes that despise the Dutch  
And rail at new-come foreigners so much,  
Forgetting that themselves are all derived  
From the most scoundrel race that ever lived;  
A horrid race of rambling thieves and drones  
Who ransacked kingdoms and dispeopled towns;  
The Pict and painted Briton, treacherous Scot,  
By hunger, theft, and rapine hither brought;  
Norwegian pirates, buccaneering Danes,  
Whose red-haired offspring everywhere remains;  
Who joined with Norman-French compound the breed  
From whence your true-born Englishmen proceed.

Dutch, Walloons, Flemings, Irishmen, and Scots,  
 Vaudois, and Valtolins and Huguenots,  
 In good Queen Bess's charitable reign,  
 Supplied us with three hundred thousand men ;  
 Religion—God we thank ! sent them hither,  
 Priests, protestants, the devil, and all together."

The first part concludes with a view of the low origin of some of our nobles.

"Innumerable city knights we know  
 From Bluecoat hospitals and Bridewell flow,  
 Draymen and porters fill the City chair,  
 And footboys magisterial purple wear.  
 Fate has but very small distinction set  
 Betwixt the counter and the coronet.  
 Tarpaulin lords, pages of high renown  
 Rise up by poor men's valour, not their own ;  
 Great families of yesterday we show  
 And lords, whose parents were the Lord knows who."

So much keen and clever invective levelled at the higher classes of course had its reward in a wide circulation ; but we are surprised to hear that the King noticed it with favour ; the author was honoured with a personal interview, and became a still stronger partizan of the court. Defoe called the "True Born Englishman,"

"A contradiction  
 In speech an irony, in fact a fiction ;"

and we may observe that he was particularly fond of an indirect and covert style of writing. He thought that he could thus use his weapons to most advantage, but his disguise was seen through by his enemies as well as by his friends. Irony—the stating the reverse of what is meant, whether good or bad—is often resorted to by

those treading on dangerous ground, and admits of two very different interpretations. It is especially ambiguous in writing, and should be used with caution. Defoe's "Shortest Way with the Dissenters" was first attributed to a High Churchman, but soon was recognised as the work of a Dissenter. He explained that he intended the opposite of what he had said, and was merely deprecating measures being taken against his brethren; but his enemies considered that his real object was to exasperate them against the Government. Even if taken ironically, it hardly seemed venial to call furiously for the extermination of heretics, or to raise such lamentation as, "Alas! for the Church of England! What with popery on one hand, and schismatics on the other, how has she been crucified between two thieves!" Experience had not then taught that it was better to let such effusions pass for what they were worth, and Defoe was sentenced to stand in the pillory, and suffer fine and imprisonment. He does not seem to have been in such low spirits as we might have expected during his incarceration, for he employed part of his time in composing his "Hymn to the Pillory,"

"Hail hieroglyphic state machine,  
Contrived to punish fancy in:  
Men that are men in thee can feel no pain,  
And all thy insignificants disdain."



He continues in a strong course of invective against certain persons whom he thinks really worthy of being thus punished, and proceeds—

“But justice is inverted when  
Those engines of the law,  
Instead of pinching vicious men  
Keep honest ones in awe:  
Thy business is, as all men know,  
To punish villains, not to make men so.

“Whenever then thou art prepared  
To prompt that vice thou shouldst reward,  
And by the terrors of thy grisly face,  
Make men turn rogues to shun disgrace;  
The end of thy creation is destroyed  
Justice expires of course, and law’s made void.

“Thou like the devil dost appear  
Blacker than really thou art far,  
A wild chimeric notion of reproach  
Too little for a crime, for none too much,  
Let none the indignity resent,  
For crime is all the shame of punishment.  
Thou bugbear of the law stand up and speak  
Thy long misconstrued silence break,  
Tell us who ’tis upon thy ridge stands there  
So full of fault, and yet so void of fear,  
And from the paper on his hat,  
Let all mankind be told for what.”

These lines refer to his own condemnation, and the piece concludes,—

“Tell them the men who placed him here  
Are friends unto the times,  
But at a loss to find his guile  
They can’t commit his crimes.”

Defoe seems to have thoroughly imbibed the ascetic spirit of his brethren. He was fond of denouncing social as well as political vanities. The “Comical Pilgrim” contains a considerable amount of coarse humour, and in one

place the supposed cynic inveighs against the drama, and describes the audience at a theatre—

“The audience in the upper gallery is composed of lawyers, clerks, valets-de-chambre, exchange girls, chambermaids, and skip-kennels, who at the last act are let in gratis in favour to their masters being benefactors to the devil’s servants. The middle gallery is taken up by the middling sort of people, as citizens, their wives and daughters, and other jilts. The boxes are filled with lords and ladies, who give money to see their follies exposed by fellows as wicked as themselves. And the pit, which lively represents the pit of hell, is crammed with those insignificant animals called beaux, whose character nothing but wonder and shame can compose; for a modern beau, you must know, is a pretty, neat, fantastic outside of a man, a well-digested bundle of costly vanities, and you may call him a volume of methodical errata bound in a gilt cover. He’s a curiously wrought cabinet full of shells and other trumpery, which were much better quite empty than so emptily filled. He’s a man’s skin full of profaneness, a paradise full of weeds, a heaven full of devils, a Satan’s bedchamber hung with arras of God’s own making. He can be thought no better than a Promethean man; at best but a lump of animated dust kneaded

into human shape, and if he has only such a thing as a soul it seems to be patched up with more vices than are patches in a poor Spaniard's coat. His general employment is to scorn all business, but the study of the modes and vices of the times, and you may look upon him as upon the painted sign of a man hung up in the air, only to be tossed to and fro with every wind of temptation and vanity."

It would appear that servants had in his day many of the faults which characterise some of them at present. In "Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business" we have an amusing picture of the over-dressed maid of the period.

"The apparel," he says, "of our women-servants should be next regulated, that we may know the mistress from the maid. I remember I was once put very much to the blush, being at a friend's house, and by him required to salute the ladies. I kissed the chamber-jade into the bargain, for she was as well dressed as the best. Bnt I was soon undeceived by a general titter, which gave me the utmost confusion; nor can I believe myself the only person who has made such a mistake.

Again "I have been at places where the maid has been so dizzied with idle compliments that she has mistook one thing for another, and not regarded her mistress in the least, but put

on all the flirting airs imaginable. This behaviour is nowhere so much complained of as in taverns, coffee houses, and places of public resort, where there are handsome barkeepers, &c. These creatures being puffed up with the fulsome flattery of a set of flies, which are continually buzzing about them, carry themselves with the utmost insolence imaginable—inasmuch that you must speak to them with the utmost deference, or you are sure to be affronted. Being at a coffee-house the other day, where one of these ladies kept the bar, I bespoke a dish of rice tea, but Madam was so taken up with her sparks that she quite forgot it. I spoke for it again, and with some temper, but was answered after a most taunting manner, not without a toss of the head, a contraction of the nostrils, and other impertinences, too many to enumerate. Seeing myself thus publickly insulted by such an animal, I could not choose but show my resentment. ‘Woman,’ said I sternly, ‘I want a dish of rice tea, and not what your vanity and impudence may imagine; therefore treat me as a gentleman and a customer, and serve me with what I call for. Keep your impertinent repartees and impudent behaviour for the coxcombs that swarm round your bar, and make you so vain of your blown carcass.’ And indeed, I believe the insolence of this

creature will ruin her master at last, by driving away men of sobriety and business, and making the place a den of vagabonds."

In July, 1704, Defoe commenced a periodical which he called a "Review of the Affairs of France." It appeared twice, and afterwards three times a week. From the introduction, we might conclude that the periodical, though principally containing war intelligence, would be partly of a humorous nature. He says—

"After our serious matters are over, we shall at the end of every paper present you with a little diversion, as anything occurs to make the world merry; and whether friend or foe, one party or another, if anything happens so scandalous as to require an open reproof, the world may meet with it there. Accordingly at the end of every paper we find 'Advice for the Scandalous Club: A weekly history of Nonsense, Impertinence, Vice, and Debauchery.'" This contained a considerable amount of indelicacy, and the humour was too much connected with ephemeral circumstances of the times to be very amusing at the present day. The Scandalous Club was a kind of Court of Morals, before whom all kinds of offences were brought for judgment, and it also settled questions on love affairs in a very judicious manner. Some of the advice is prompted by

letters asking for it, but it is probable that they were mostly fictitious and written by Defoe himself. Many of the shafts in this Review were directed against magistrates, and other men in authority. Thus we read in April 18, 1704:

“An honest country fellow made a complaint to the Club that he had been set in the stocks by the Justice of the Peace without any manner of reason. He told them that he happened to get a little drunk one night at a fair, and being somewhat quarrelsome, had beaten a man in his neighbourhood, broke his windows, and two or three such odd tricks. ‘Well, friend,’ said the Director of the Society, ‘and was it for this the Justice set you in the stocks?’ ‘Yes!’ replied the man. ‘And don’t you think you deserved it?’ said the Director. ‘Why, yes, Sir,’ says the honest man; ‘I had deserved it from you, if you had been the Justice, but I did not deserve it from Sir Edward—for it was not above a month before that he was so drunk that he fell into our mill-pond, and if I had not lugged him out he would have been drowned.’ The Society told him he was a knave, and then voted ‘that the Justice had done him no wrong in setting him in the stocks—but that he had done the

nation wrong when he pulled him out of the pond,' and caused it to be entered in their books—'That Sir Edward was but an indifferent Justice of the Peace.' "

Sometimes religious subjects are touched upon. The following may be interesting at the present day—

"There happened a great and bloody fight this week, (July 18th 1704), between two ladies of quality, one a Roman Catholic, the other a Protestant; and as the matter had come to blows, and beauty was concerned in the quarrel, having been not a little defaced by the rudeness of the scratching sex, the neighbours were called in to part the fray, and upon debate the quarrel was referred to the Scandalous Club. The matter was this :

"The Roman Catholic lady meets the Protestant lady in the Park, and found herself obliged every time she passed her to make a reverent curtsy, though she had no knowledge of her or acquaintance with her. The Protestant lady received it at first as a civility, but afterwards took it for a banter, and at last for an affront, and sends her woman to know the meaning of it. The Catholic lady returned for answer that she did not make her honours to the lady, for she knew no respect she deserved, but to the diamond cross she wore about her

neck, which she, being a heretic, did not deserve to wear. The Protestant lady sent her an angry message, and withal some reflecting words upon the cross itself, which ended the present debate, but occasioned a solemn visit from the Catholic lady to the Protestant, where they fell into grievous disputes; and one word followed another till the Protestant lady offered some indignities to the jewel, took it from her neck and set her foot upon it—which so provoked the other lady that that they fell to blows, till the waiting-women, having in vain attempted to part them, the footmen were fain to be called in. After they were parted, they ended the battle with their other missive weapon, the tongue—and there was all the eloquence of Billingsgate on both sides more than enough. At last, by the advice of friends it was, as is before noted, brought before the Society.”

The judgment was that for a Protestant to wear a cross was a “ridiculous, scandalous piece of vanity”—that it should only be worn in a religious sense, and with due respect, and is not more fitting to be used as an ornament than “a gibbet, which, worn about the neck, would make but a scurvy figure.”

Most of the stories show the democratic tendencies of the writer, for instance—



"A poor man's cow had got into a rich man's corn, and he put her into the pound; the poor man offered satisfaction, but the rich man insisted on unreasonable terms, and both went to the Justice of the Peace. The Justice advised the man to comply, for he could not help him; at last the rich man came to this point; he would have ten shillings for the damage. 'And will you have ten shillings,' says the poor man, 'for six pennyworth of damage?' 'Yes, I will,' says the rich man. 'Then the devil will have you,' says the poor man. 'Well,' says the rich man, 'let the devil and I alone to agree about that, give me the ten shillings.'"

"A gentleman came with a great equipage and a fine coach to the Society, and desired to be heard. He told them a long story of his wife; how ill-natured, how sullen, how unkind she was, and that in short she made his life very uncomfortable. The Society asked him several questions about her, whether she was

"Unfaithful? No.

"A thief? No.

"A Slut? No.

"A scold? No.

"A drunkard? No.

“A Gossip? No.

“But still she was an ill wife, and very bad wife, and he did not know what to do with her. At last one of the Society asked him, ‘If his worship was a good husband,’ at which being a little surprised, he could not tell what to say. Whereupon the Club resolved,

“1. That most women that are bad wives are made so by their husbands. 2. That this Society will hear no complaint against a virtuous bad wife from a vicious good husband. 3. He that has a bad wife and can’t find the reason of it in her, ’tis ten to one that he finds it in himself.”

Sometimes correspondents ask advice as to which of several lovers they should choose. The following applicants have a different grievances.

“Gentlemen.—There are no less than sixty ladies of us, all neighbours, dwelling in the same village, that are now arrived at those years at which we expect (if ever) to be caressed and adored, or, at least flattered. We have often heard of the attempts of whining lovers; of the charming poems they had composed in praise of their mistresses’ wit and beauty (tho’ they have not had half so much of either of them as the meanest in our company), of the passions of their love, and

that death itself had presently followed upon a denial. But we find now that the men, especially of our village, are so dull and lumpish, so languid and indifferent, that we are almost forced to put words into their mouths, and when they have got them they have scarce spirit to utter them. So that we are apt to fear it will be the fate of all of us, as it is already of some, to live to be old maids. Now the thing, Gentlemen, that we desire of you is, that, if possible, you would let us understand the reason why the case is so mightily altered from what it was formerly ; for our experience is so vastly different from what we have heard, that we are ready to believe that all the stories we have heard of lovers and their mistresses are fictions and mere banter."

The case of these ladies is indeed to be pitied, and the Society have been further informed that the backwardness or fewness of the men in that town has driven the poor ladies to unusual extremities, such as running out into the fields to meet the men, and sending their maids to ask them ; and at last running away with their fathers' coachmen, prentices, and the like, to the particular scandal of the town.

The Society concluded that the ladies should leave the village "famous for having more

coaches than Christians in it," as a learned man once took the freedom to tell them "from the pulpit" and go to market, *i.e.*, to London.

The "Advice of the Scandalous Club" was discontinued from May, 1703.

Although we cannot say that Defoe carried his sword in a myrtle wreath, he certainly owed much of his celebrity to his insinuating under ambiguous language the boldest political opinions. He was fond of literary whimsicalities, and wrote a humorous "History," referring mostly to the events of the times. Towards the end of his career, he happily turned his talent for disguises and fictions into a quieter and more profitable direction. How many thousands remember him as the author of "Robinson Crusoe" who never heard a word about his jousts and conflicts, his animosities and misfortunes!

The last century, although adorned by several celebrated wits, was less rich in humour than the present. Literature had a grave and pedantic character, for where there was any mental activity, instruction was sought almost to the exclusion of gaiety. It required a greater spread of education and experience to create a source of superior humour, or to awaken any considerable demand for it. Hence, although

the taste was so increased that several periodicals of a professedly humorous nature were started, they disappeared soon after their commencement. To record their brief existence is like writing the epitaphs of the departed. Towards the termination of the previous century, comic literature was represented by an occasional fly-sheet, shot off to satirize some absurdity of the day. The first humorous periodical which has come to our knowledge, partakes, as might have been expected, of an ecclesiastical character and betokens the severity of the times. It appeared in 1670, under the title of "*Jesuita Vapulans, or a Whip for the Fool's Back, and a Gad for his Foul Mouth.*" The next seems to have been a small weekly paper called "*Heraclitus Ridens,*" published in 1681. It was mostly directed against Dissenters and Republicans; and in No. 9, we have a kind of Litany commencing:—

"From Commonwealth, Cobblers and zealous State  
Tinkers,  
From Speeches and Expedients of Politick Blinkers,  
From Rebellion, Taps, and Tapsters, and Skinkers,  
Liberate Nos.

"From Papists on one hand, and Phanatick on th' other,  
From Presbyterian Jack, the Pope's younger brother,  
And Congregational Daughters, far worse than their  
Mother,  
Liberate Nos."

In the same year appeared "*Hippocrates Ridens,*" directed against quacks and pretenders

to physic, who seem then to have been numerous. The contents of these papers were mostly in dialogue—a form which seems to have been approved, as it was afterwards adopted in similar publications. These papers do not seem to have been written by contributors from the public, but by one or two persons, and this, I believe, was the case with all the periodicals of this time, and one cause of their want of permanence—the periodical was not carried on by an editor, but by its author.

The “London Spy” appeared in 1699, and went through eighteen monthly parts. Any one who wishes to find a merry description of London manners at the end of the seventeenth century, cannot look in a better place. It was written by Edward (Ned) Ward, author of an indifferent narrative entitled “A Trip to Jamaica ;” but he must have possessed considerable observation and talent. A man who proposes to visit and unmask all the places of resort, high and low in the metropolis, could not have much refinement in his nature, but at the present day we cannot help wondering how a work should have been published and bought, containing so much gross language.

Under the character of a countryman who has come up to see the world, he gives us some amusing glimpses of the metropolis, for

instance. He goes to dine with some beaux at a tavern, and gives the following description of the entertainment :—

“ As soon as we came near the bar, a thing started up all ribbons, lace, and feathers, and made such a noise with her bell and her tongue together, that had half-a-dozen paper-mills been at work within three yards of her, they'd have signified no more to her clamorous voice than so many lutes to a drum, which alarmed two or three nimble-heel'd fellows aloft, who shot themselves downstairs with as much celerity as a mountebank's Mercury upon a rope from the top of a church-steeple, every one charged with a mouthful of 'coming! coming!' This sudden clatter at our appearance so surprised me that I looked as silly as a bumpkin translated from the plough-tail to the play-house, when it rains fire in the tempest, or when Don John's at dinner with the subterranean assembly of terrible hobgoblins. He that got the start and first approached us of these greyhound-footed emissaries, desir'd us to walk up, telling my companion his friends were above; then with a hop, stride and jump, ascended the stair-head before us, and from thence conducted us to a spacious room, where about a dozen of my schoolfellow's acquaintances were ready to receive us. Upon our entrance they all started up, and on a suddain screwed themselves into so many antick postures, that had I not seen them first erect, I should have query'd with myself, whether I was fallen into the company of men or monkeys.

“ This academical fit of riggling agility was almost over before I rightly understood the meaning on't, and found at last they were only showing one another how many sorts of apes' gestures and fops' cringes had been invented since the French dancing-masters undertook to teach our English gentry to make scaramouches of themselves; and how to entertain their poor friends, and pacifie their needy creditors with compliments and congies. When every person with abundance of pains had shown the ultimate of his breeding, contending about a quarter of an hour who should sit down first, as if we waited the coming of some herald to fix us in our proper places, which with much difficulty being at last agreed on, we proceed to a whet of old hock to sharpen our appetites to our approaching dinner; though I confess my stomach was as keen already as a greyhound's to his supper after a day's coursing, or a miserly livery-man's, who had fasted three days to prepare himself for a Lord Mayor's feast. The honest cook

gave us no leisure to tire our appetites by a tedious expectancy; for in a little time the cloth was laid, and our first course was ushered up by the *dominus factotum* in great order to the table, which consisted of two calves'-heads and a couple of geese. I could not but laugh in my conceit to think with what judgment the caterer had provided so lucky an entertainment for so suitable a company. After the victuals were pretty well cooled, in complimenting who should begin first, we all fell to; and ifaith I found by their eating, they were no ways affronted by their fare; for in less time than an old woman could crack a nut, we had not left enough to dine the bar-boy. The conclusion of our dinner was a stately Cheshire cheese, of a groaning size, of which we devoured more in three minutes than a million of maggots could have done in three weeks. After cheese comes nothing; then all we desired was a clear stage and no favour; accordingly everything was whipped away in a trice by so cleanly a conveyance, that no juggler by virtue of Hocus Pocus could have conjured away balls with more dexterity. All our empty plates and dishes were in an instant changed into full quarts of purple nectar and unsullied glasses. Then a bumper to the Queen led the van of our good wishes, another to the Church Established, a third left to the whimsie of the toaster, till at last their slippery engines of verbosity coined nonsense with such a facil fluency, that a parcel of alley-gossips at a christening, after the sack had gone twice round, could not with their tattling tormentors be a greater plague to a fumbling godfather, than their lame jest and impertinent conundrums were to a man of my temper. Oaths were as plenty as weeds in an alms-house garden.

"The night was spent in another tavern in harmony, the songs being such as:—

"Musicks a crotchet the sober think vain,  
 The fiddle's a wooden projection,  
 Tunes are but flirts of a whimsical brain,  
 Which the bottle brings best to perfection:  
 Musicians are half-witted, merry and mad,  
 The same are all those that admire 'em,  
 They're fools if they play unless they're well paid,  
 And the others are blockheads to hire 'em."

Perhaps the most interesting account is that of St. Paul's Cathedral—then in progress. We all know that it was nearly fifty years in



building, but have not perhaps been aware of all the causes of the delay :—

“Thence we turned through the west gate of St. Paul's Churchyard, where we saw a parcel of stone-cutters and sawyers so very hard at work, that I protest, notwithstanding the vehemency of their labour, and the temperateness of the season, instead of using their handkerchiefs to wipe the sweat off their faces, they were most of them blowing their nails. ‘Bless me!’ said I to my friend, ‘sure this church stands in a colder climate than the rest of the nation, or else those fellows are of a strange constitution to seem ready to freeze at such warm exercise.’ ‘You must consider,’ says my friend, ‘this is work carried on at a national charge, and ought not to be hastened on in a hurry; for the greater reputation it will gain when it's finished will be, “That it was so many years in building.”’ From thence we moved up a long wooden bridge that led to the west porticum of the church, where we intermixed with such a train of promiscuous rabble that I fancied we looked like the beasts driving into the ark in order to replenish a new succeeding world. . . .

“We went a little farther, where we observed ten men in a corner, very busie about two men's work, taking as much care that everyone should have his due proportion of the labour, as so many thieves in making an exact division of their booty. The wonderful piece of difficulty, the whole number had to perform, was to drag along a stone of about three hundred weight in a carriage in order to be hoisted upon the moldings of the cupula, but were so fearful of dispatching this facile undertaking with too much expedition, that they were longer in hauling on't half the length of the church, than a couple of lusty porters, I am certain, would have been carrying it to Paddington, without resting of their burthen.

“We took notice of the vast distance of the pillars from whence they turn the cupula, on which, they say, is a spire to be erected three hundred feet in height, whose towering pinnacle will stand with such stupendous loftiness above Bow Steeple dragon or the Monument's flaming urn, that it will appear to the rest of the Holy Temples like a cedar of Lebanon, among so many shrubs, or a Goliath looking over the shoulders of so many Davids.”

“The British Apollo, or curious Amusements for the Ingenious, performed by a Society

of Gentlemen ;" appeared in 1708, and seems to have been a weekly periodical, and to have been soon discontinued. The greater part of it consisted of questions and answers. Information was desired on all sorts of abstruse and absurd points—some scriptural, others referring to natural philosophy, or to matters of social interest.

*Question.* Messieurs. Pray instruct your Petitioner how he shall go away for the ensuing Long Vacation, having little liberty, and less money. Yours, SOLITARY.

*Answer.* Study the virtues of patience and abstinence. A right judgment in the theory may make the practice more agreeable.

*Ques.* Gentlemen. I desire your resolution of the following question, and you will oblige your humble servant, Sylvia. Whether a woman hath not a right to know all her husband's concerns, and in particular whether she may not demand a sight of all the letters he receives, which if he denies, whether she may not open them privately without his consent?

*Ans.* Gently, gently, good nimble-fingered lady, you run us out of breath and patience to trace your unexampled ambition. What! break open your husband's letters! no, no; that privilege once granted, no chain could hold you; you would soon proceed to break in upon his conjugal affection, and commit a burglary upon the cabinet of his authority. But to be serious, although a well-bred husband would hardly deny a wife the satisfaction of perusing his familiar letters, we can noways think it prudent, much less his duty, to communicate all to her; since most men, especially such as are employed in public affairs, are often trusted with important secrets, and such as no wife can reasonably pretend to claim knowledge of.

*Ques.* Apollo say,  
Whence 'tis I pray,  
The ancient custom came,  
Stockins to throw  
(I'm sure you know,)  
At bridegroom and dame?

*Ans.* When Britons bold

Bedded of old,  
Sandals were backward thrown,  
The pair to tell,  
That ill or well,  
The act was all their own.

*Ques.* Long by Orlinda's precepts did I move,  
Nor was my heart a foe or slave to love,  
My soul was free and calm, no storm appeared,  
While my own sex my love and friendship shared;  
The men with due respect I always used,  
And proffered hearts still civilly refused.  
This was my state when young Alexis came  
With all the expressions of an ardent flame,  
He baffles all the objections I can make,  
And slights superior matches for my sake;  
Our humour seem for one another made,  
And all things else in equal ballance laid;  
I love him too, and could vouchsafe to wear  
The matrimonial hoop, but that I fear  
His love should not continue, cause I'm told,  
That women sooner far than men grow old;  
I, by some years, am eldest of the two,  
Therefore, pray Sirs, advise me what to do.

*Ans.* If 'tis your age alone retards your love,  
You may with ease that groundless fear remove;  
For if you're older, you are wiser too,  
Since few in wit must hope to equal you.  
You may securely, therefore, crown a joy,  
Not all the plagues of Hymen can destroy,  
For tho' in marriage some unhappy be,  
They are not, sure, so fair, so wise as thee.

## CHAPTER III.

Swift—"Tale of a Tub"—Essays—Gulliver's Travels—  
 Variety of Swift's Humour—Riddles—Stella's Wit—  
 Directions for Servants—Arbuthnot.

THE year 1667 saw the birth of Swift, one of the most highly gifted and successful humorists any country ever produced. A bright fancy runs like a vein of gold through nearly all his writings, and enriches the wide and varied field upon which he enters. He says of himself—

"Swift had the sin of wit, no venial crime;  
 Nay, 'tis affirmed he sometimes dealt in rhyme:  
 Humour and mirth had place in all he writ,  
 He reconciled divinity and wit."

Whether religion, politics, social follies, or domestic peculiarities come before him, he was irresistibly tempted to regard them in a ludicrous point of view. He observes—

"It is my peculiar case to be often under a temptation to be witty, upon occasions where I could be neither wise nor sound, nor anything to the matter in hand."

This general tendency was the foundation of his fortunes, and gained him the favour of Sir William Temple, and of such noblemen as

Berkeley, Oxford, and Bolingbroke They could nowhere find so pleasant a companion, for his natural talent was improved by cultivation, and it is when humour is united with learning—a rare combination—that it attains its highest excellence. There was much classical erudition at that day, and it was exhibited by men of letters in their ordinary conversation in a way which would appear to us pedantic. Thus many of Swift's best sayings turned on an allusion to some ancient author, as when speaking of the emptiness of modern writers, who depend upon compilations and digressions for filling up a treatise “that shall make a very comely figure on a bookseller's shelf, there to be preserved neat and clean for a long eternity, never to be thumbed or greased by students: but when the fulness of time is come, shall happily undergo the trial of purgatory in order to ascend the sky.” He continues:—

“From such elements as these I am alive to behold the day, wherein the corporation of authors can outvie all its brethren in the guild. A happiness derived to us, with a great many others, from our Scythian ancestors, among whom the number of pens was so infinite that Grecian eloquence had no other way of expressing it than by saying that in the regions of the north it was hardly possible for a man to travel—the very air was so replete with feathers.”

The above is taken from the “Tale of a Tub” published in 1704, but never directly

owned by him. At the commencement of it he says that,

“Wisdom is a fox, who after long hunting will at last cost you the pains to dig out; it is a cheese which, by how much the richer, has the thicker, the homelier, and the coarser coat; and whereof to a judicious palate the maggots are the best; it is a sack posset, wherein the deeper you go you will find it the sweeter. Wisdom is a hen, whose cackling we must value and consider, because it is attended with an egg, but then, lastly, it is a nut, which unless you choose with judgment may cost you a tooth, and pay you with nothing but a worm.”

He attacks indiscriminately the Pope, Luther, and Calvin. Of the first he says—

“I have seen him, Peter, in his fits take three old high-crowned hats, and clap them all on his head three story high, with a huge bunch of keys at his girdle, and an angling rod in his left hand. In which guise, whoever went to take him by the hand in the way of salutation, Peter with much grace, like a well educated spaniel, would present them with his foot; and if they refused his civility, then he would raise it as high as their chaps, and give them a damned kick in the mouth, which has ever since been called a salute.”

He also ridicules Transubstantiation, representing Peter as asking his brothers to dine, and giving them a loaf of bread, and insisting that it was mutton.

In the history of Martin Luther—a continuation of the “Tale of a Tub,” he represents Queen Elizabeth as “setting up a shop for those of her own farm, well furnished with powders, plasters, salves, and all other drugs necessary, all right and true, composed according to receipts made by physicians and apothecaries of her own creating, which they extracted

out of Peter's, Martin's, and Jack's receipt books; and of this muddle and hodge-podge made up a dispensary of their own—strictly forbidding any other to be used, and particularly Peter's, from whom the greater part of this new dispensatory was stolen."

At the conclusion of the "Tale of a Tub," he says, "Among a very polite nation in Greece there were the same temples built and consecrated to Sleep and the Muses, between which two deities they believed the greatest friendship was established. He says he differs from other writers in that he shall be too proud, if by all his labours he has any ways contributed to the repose of mankind in times so turbulent and unquiet."

It is evident from this work, as from the "Battle of the Books," "The Spider and the Bee," and other of his writings, that Allegory was still in high favour.

Swift first appeared as a professed author in 1708, when he wrote against astrologers, and prophetic almanack-makers, called philomaths—then numerous, but now only represented by Zadkiel. This Essay was one of those, which gave rise to "The Tatler." He wrote about the same time, "An argument against Christianity"—an ironical way of rebuking the irreligion of the time—

"It is urged that there are by computation in this kingdom above ten thousand persons, whose revenues added to those of my lords the bishops, would suffice to maintain two hundred young gentlemen of wit and pleasure, and freethinking,—enemies to priestcraft, narrow principles, pedantry, and prejudices; who might be an ornament to the court and town; and then again, so great a body of able (bodied) divines might be a recruit to our fleet and armies."

"Another advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity is the clear gain of one day in seven, which is now entirely lost, and consequently the kingdom one seventh less in trade, business, and pleasure; besides the loss to the public of so many stately structures, now in the hands of the clergy, which might be converted into play-houses, market-houses, exchanges, common dormitories, and other public edifices. I hope I shall be forgiven a hard word, if I call this a perfect *cavil*. I readily own there has been an old custom, time out of mind, for people to assemble in the churches every Sunday, and that shops are still frequently shut, in order, as it is conceived, to preserve the ancient practice, but how they can be a hindrance to business or pleasure it is hard to imagine. What if the men of pleasure are forced one day in the week to game at home instead of in the chocolate houses? Are not the taverns and coffee-houses open? Is not that the chief day for traders to sum up the accounts of the week, and for lawyers to prepare their briefs. . . . But I would fain know how it can be contended that the churches are misapplied? Where more care to appear in the foremost box with greater advantage of dress. Where more meetings for business, where more bargains are driven, and where so many conveniences and enticements to sleep?"

"I am very sensible how much the gentlemen of wit and pleasure are apt to murmur, and be choked at the sight of so many draggle-tailed parsons, who happen to fall in their way and offend their eyes; but at the same time, these wise reformers do not consider what an advantage and felicity it is for great wits to be always provided with objects of scorn and contempt, in order to exercise and improve their talents, and divert their spleen from falling on each other, or on themselves; especially, when all this may be done without the least imaginable danger to their persons."

"And to add another argument of a parallel nature—if



Christianity were once abolished, how could the free-thinkers the strong reasoners, and the men of profound learning be able to find another subject so calculated in all points, whereon to display their abilities? What wonderful productions of wit should we be deprived of, from those whose genius, by continual practice, has been wholly turned upon raillery and invectives against religion, and would, therefore never be able to shine or distinguish themselves upon any other subject! We are daily complaining of the great decline of Wit among us, and would we take away the greatest, perhaps the only topic we have left? Who would ever have suspected Asgil for a wit, and Toland for a philosopher, if the inexhaustible supply of Christianity had not been at hand to provide them with materials? What other subject through all Art and Nature could have produced Tindal for a profound author, and furnished him with readers? It is the wise choice of the subject, which alone adorns and distinguishes the writer. For had a hundred such pens as these been employed on the side of religion, they would have sunk into silence and oblivion."

Pope claims to have shadowed forth such a work as *Gulliver's Travels* in the *Memoirs of Martin Scriblerus*; but Swift, no doubt, took the idea from Lucian's "*True History*." He was also indebted to Philostratus, who speaks of an army of pigmies attacking Hercules. Something may also have been gathered from Defoe's minuteness of detail; and he made use of all these with a master-hand to improve and increase the fertile resources of his own mind. Swift produced the work, by which he will always survive, and be young. In the voyage to Lilliput he depreciates the court and ministers of George I., by comparing them to something insignificantly small: in the voyage to Brobdingnag by likening them to something grand and noble. But the immortality of the work

owes nothing to such considerations but everything to humour and fancy, especially to the general satire upon human vanity. "The Emperor of Lilliput is taller by almost the breadth of my nail than any of his Court, which alone is enough to strike awe into beholders."

In the *Honyhuhums*, the human race is compared to the *Yahoos*, and placed in a loathsome and ridiculous light. They are represented as most irrational creatures, frequently engaged in wars or acrimonious disputes as to whether flesh be bread, or bread be flesh, whether it be better to kiss a post or throw it into the fire, and what is the best colour of a coat!—referring to religious disputes between Catholics and Protestants. He says, that among the *Yahoos*. "It is a very justifiable cause of war to invade the country after the people have been wasted by famine, destroyed by pestilence, or embroiled by factions among themselves." With regard to internal matters, "there is a society of men among us, bred up from youth in the art of proving by words multiplied for the purpose, that white is black, and black is white, according as they are paid. In this society all the rest of the people are slaves."

Swift's humour, as has been already intimated,

by no means confined itself to being a mere vehicle of instruction. It luxuriated in a hundred forms, and on every passing subject. He wrote verses for great women, and for those who sold oysters and herrings, as well as apples and oranges. The flying leaves, so common at that time, contained a great variety of squibs and parodies written by him. Here, for instance is a travesty of Ambrose Philips' address to Miss Carteret—

“ Happiest of the spaniel race  
Painter with thy colours grace,  
Draw his forehead large and high,  
Draw his blue and humid eye,  
Draw his neck, so smooth and round,  
Little neck, with ribbons bound,  
And the spreading even back,  
Soft and sleek, and glossy black,  
And the tail that gently twines  
Like the tendrils of the vines,  
And the silky twisted hair  
Shadowing thick the velvet ear,  
Velvet ears, which hanging low  
O'er the veiny temples flow . . . ”

He could scarcely stay at an inn without scratching something humorous on the window pane. At the Four Crosses in the Watling Street Road, Warwickshire, he wrote—

“ Fool to put up four crosses at your door  
Put up your wife—she's crosser than all four.”

On another, he deprecated this scribbling on windows, which, it seems, was becoming too general—

“The sage, who said he should be proud  
Of windows in his breast  
Because he ne’er a thought allowed  
That might not be confessed;  
His window scrawled, by every rake,  
His breast again would cover  
And fairly bid the devil take  
The diamond and the lover.”

The members of the Kit Kat club used to write epigrams in honour of their “Toasts” on their wine glasses.\*

He sometimes amused himself with writing ingenious riddles. Additional grace was added to them by giving them a poetic form. They differ from modern riddles, which are nearly all prose, and turn upon puns. They more resemble the old Greek and Roman enigmas, but have not their obscurity or simplicity. Most of them are long, but the following will serve as a specimen—

“We are little airy creatures  
All of different voice and features;  
One of us in glass is set,  
One of us you’ll find in jet

---

\* Haynes writes, “I have known a gentleman of another turn of humour, who despises the name of author, never printed his works, but contracted his talent, and by the help of a very fine diamond which he wore on his little finger, was a considerable poet on glass. He had a very good epigrammatic wit; and there was not a parlour or tavern window where he visited or dined for some years, which did not receive some sketches or memorials of it. It was his misfortune at last to lose his genius and his ring to a sharper at play, and he has not attempted to make a verse since.

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T'other you may see in tin,  
And the fourth a box within  
If the fifth you should pursue,  
It can never fly from you."

This may have suggested to Miss C. Fanshawe her celebrated enigma on the letter H.

The humorous talent possessed by the Dean made him a great acquisition in society, and, as it appears, somewhat too fascinating to the fair sex. Ladies have never been able to decide satisfactorily why he did not marry. It may have been that having lived in grand houses, he did not think he had a competent income. In his thoughts on various subjects, he says, "Matrimony has many children, Repentance, Discord, Poverty, Jealousy, Sickness, Spleen, &c."

His sentimental and platonic friendship with young ladies, to whom he gave poetical names, made them historical, but not happy. "Stella," to whom he is supposed to have been privately married before her death, charmed him with her loveliness and wit. Some of his prettiest pieces, in which poetry is intermingled with humour, were written to her. In an address to her in 1719, on her attaining thirty-five years of age, after speaking of the affection travellers have for the old "Angel Inn," he says—

“Now this is Stella’s case in fact  
An angel’s face a little cracked,  
(Could poets or could painters fix  
How angels look at thirty-six)  
This drew us in at first to find  
In such a form an angel’s mind ;  
And every virtue now supplies  
The fainting rays of Stella’s eyes  
See at her levée crowding swains  
Whom Stella greatly entertains  
With breeding humour, wit, and sense  
And puts them out to small expense,  
Their mind so plentifully fills  
And makes such reasonable bills,  
So little gets, for what she gives  
We really wonder how she lives,  
And had her stock been less, no doubt,  
She must have long ago run out.”

Swift says that Stella “always said the best thing in the company,” but to judge by the specimens he has preserved, this must have been the opinion of a lover, unless the society she moved in was extremely dull. At the same time those who assert that her allusions were coarse, have no good foundation for such a calumny. Her humour contrasted with that of the Dean, both in its weakness and its delicacy. Swift was too fond of bringing forward into the light what should be concealed, but saw the fault in others, and imputed it to an absence of inventive power. He writes—

“You do not treat nature wisely by always striving to get beneath the surface. What to show and to conceal she knows, it

is one of her eternal laws to put her best furniture forward."

The last of his writings before his mind gave way was his "Directions to Servants." It was compiled apparently from jottings set down in hours of idleness, and shows that his love of humour survived as long as any of his faculties. He was blamed by Lord Orrery for turning his mind to such trifling concerns, and the stricture might have had some weight had not his primary object been to amuse. That this was his aim rather than mere correction, is evident from the specious reasons he gives for every one of his precepts, and he would have found it difficult to choose a subject which would meet with a more general response.

The following few extracts will give an idea of the work—

"Rules that concern all servants in general—When your master or lady calls a servant by name, if that servant be not in the way, none of you are to answer, for then there will be no end of drudgery; and masters themselves allow that if a servant comes, when he is called, it is sufficient.

"When you have done a fault, be always pert and insolent, and behave yourself as if you were the injured person; this will immediately put your master or lady off their mettle.

"The cook, the butler, the groom, the market-man, and every other servant, who is concerned in the expenses of the family, should act as if his whole master's estate ought to be applied to that peculiar business. For instance, if the cook computes his master's estate to be a thousand pounds a year, he reasonably concludes that a thousand pounds a year will afford meat enough, and therefore he need not be sparing; the butler makes the same judgment; so may the

groom and the coachman, and thus every branch of expense will be filled to your master's honour.

Take all tradesmen's parts against your master, and when you are sent to buy anything, never offer to cheapen it, but generously pay the full demand. This is highly to your master's honour, and may be some shillings in your pocket, and you are to consider, if your master has paid too much, he can better afford the loss than a poor tradesman.

"Write your own name and your sweetheart's with the smoke of a candle on the roof of the kitchen, or the servant's hall to show your learning.

"Lay all faults upon a lap dog or favourite cat, a monkey, a parrot, or a child; or on the servant, who was last turned off; by this rule you will excuse yourself, do no hurt to anybody else, and save your master or lady the trouble and vexation of chiding.

"When you cut bread for a toast, do not stand idly watching it, but lay it on the coals, and mind your other business; then come back, and if you find it toasted quite through, scrape off the burnt side and serve it up.

"When a message is sent to your master, be kind to your brother servant who brings it; give him the best liquor in your keeping, for your master's honour; and, at the first opportunity he will do the same to you.

"When you are to get water for tea, to save firing, and to make more haste, pour it into the tea-kettle from the pot where cabbage or fish have been boiling, which will make it much wholesomer by curing the acid and corroding quality of the tea.

"Directions to cooks.—Never send up the leg of a fowl at supper, while there is a cat or dog in the house that can be accused of running away with it, but if there happen to be neither, you must lay it upon the rats, or a stray greyhound.

"When you roast a long joint of meat, be careful only about the middle, and leave the two extreme parts raw, which will serve another time and also save firing.

"Let a red-hot coal, now and then fall into the dripping pan that the smoke of the dripping may ascend and give the roast meat a high taste.

"If your dinner miscarries in almost every dish, how could you help it? You were teased by the footman coming into the kitchen; and to prove it, take occasion to be angry, and throw a ladleful of broth on one or two of their liveries.

"To Footmen.—In order to learn the secrets of other families, tell them those of your masters; thus you will



grow a favourite both at home and abroad, and be regarded as a person of importance.

"Never be seen in the streets with a basket or bundle in your hands, and carry nothing but what you can hide in your pockets, otherwise you will disgrace your calling; to prevent which, always retain a blackguard boy to carry your loads, and if you want farthings, pay him with a good slice of bread or scrap of meat.

"Let a shoe-boy clean your own boots first, then let him clean your master's. Keep him on purpose for that use, and pay him with scraps. When you are sent on an errand, be sure to edge in some business of your own, either to see your sweetheart, or drink a pot of ale with some brother servants, which is so much time clear gained. Take off the largest dishes and set them on with one hand, to show the ladies your strength and vigour, but always do it between two ladies that if the dish happens to slip, the soup or sauce may fall on their clothes, and not daub the floor."

We think that he might have written "directions" for the masters of his day, as by incidental allusions he makes, we find they were not unaccustomed to beat their servants.

Sarcasm was Swift's foible. But we must remember that the age in which he lived was that of Satire. Humour then took that form as in the latter days of Rome. Critical acumen had attained a considerable height, but the state of affairs was not sufficiently settled and tranquil to foster mutual forbearance and amity. Swift, it must be granted, was not so personal as most of his contemporaries, seeking in his wit rather to amuse his friends than to wound his rivals. But his scoffing spirit made him enemies—some of whom taking advantage of certain expressions on church matters in "The

Tale of a Tub" prejudiced Queen Anne, and placed an insuperable obstacle in the way of his ambition. He writes of himself.

"Had he but spared his tongue and pen  
He might have rose like other men;  
But power was never in his thought  
And wealth he valued not a groat."

In his poem on his own death, written in 1731, he concludes with the following general survey—

"Perhaps I may allow the Dean  
Had too much satire in his vein;  
And seemed determined not to starve it,  
Because no age could more deserve it.  
Yet malice never was his aim  
He lashed the vice, but spared the name:  
No individual could repent  
Where thousands equally meant;  
His satire points out no defect  
But what all mortals may correct;  
For he abhorred that senseless tribe  
Who call it humour, when they gibe:  
He spared a hump or crooked nose  
Whose owners set not up for beaux.  
Some genuine dulness moved his pity  
Unless it offered to be witty.  
Those who their ignorance confessed  
He ne'er offended with a jest;  
But laughed to hear an idiot quote  
A verse of Horace, learned by rote.  
He knew a hundred pleasing stories  
With all the turns of Whigs and Tories;  
Was cheerful to his dying day,  
And friends would let him have his way.  
He gave the little wealth he had  
To build a house for fools and mad;  
And showed by one satiric touch,  
No nation wanted it so much,  
That kingdom he has left his debtor,  
I wish it soon may have a better."

We may here mention a minor luminary,

which shone in the constellation in Queen Anne's classic reign. Pope said that of all the men that he had met Arbuthnot had the most prolific wit, allowing Swift only the second place. Robinson Crusoe—at first thought to be a true narrative—was attributed to him, and in the company who formed themselves into the Scriblerus Club to write critiques or rather satires on the literature, science and politics of the day, we have the names of Oxford, Bolingbroke, Swift, Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot. Of the last, who seems to have written mostly in prose, a few works survive devoid of all the coarseness which stains most contemporary productions and also deficient in point of wit. It is noteworthy that the two authors who endeavoured to introduce a greater delicacy into the literature of the day, were both court physicians to Queen Anne. The death of this sovereign caused the Scriblerus project to be abandoned, but Gulliver's Travels, which had formed part of it, were afterwards continued, and some of the introductory papers remain, especially one called "*Martinus Scriblerus*," supposed to have been the work of Arbuthnot. It contains a violent onslaught principally upon Sir Richard Blackmore's poetry, such as we should more easily attribute to Pope, or at least to his suggestions. It resembles "*The Dunciad*" in

containing more bitterness than humour. Examples are given of the "Pert style," the "Alamode" style, the "Finical style." The exceptions taken to such hyperbole as the following, seem to be the best founded—

OF A LION.

"He roared so loud and looked so wondrous grim  
His very shadow durst not follow him."

OF A LADY AT DINNER.

"The silver whiteness that adorns thy neck  
Sullies the plate, and makes the napkins black."

OF THE SAME.

"The obscurity of her birth  
Cannot eclipse the lustre of her eyes  
Which make her all one light."

OF A BULL BAITING.

"Up to the stars the sprawling mastiffs fly  
And add new monsters to the frightened sky."

There is a certain amount of humour in Arbuthnot's "History of John Bull," and in his "Harmony in an Uproar." A letter to Frederick Handel, Esquire, Master of the Opera House in the Haymarket, from Hurlothrumbo Johnson, Esquire, Composer Extraordinary to all the theatres in Great Britain, excepting that of the Haymarket, commences—

"Wonderful Sir!—The mounting flames of my ambition have long aspired to the honour of holding a small conversation with you; but being sensible of the almost insuperable difficulty of getting at you, I bethought me a paper kite might best reach you, and soar to your apartment, though seated in the highest clouds, for all the world knows I can top you, fly as high as you will."

But we may consider his best piece to be  
"A Learned Dissertation on Dumpling."

"The Romans, tho' our conquerors, found themselves much outdone in dumplings by our forefathers; the Roman dumplings being no more to compare to those made by the Britons, than a stone dumpling is to a marrow pudding; though indeed the British dumpling at that time was little better than what we call a stone dumpling, nothing else but flour and water. But every generation growing wiser and wiser the project was improved, and dumpling grew to be pudding. One projector found milk better than water; another introduced butter; some added marrow, others plums; and some found out the use of sugar; so that to speak truth, we know not where to fix the genealogy or chronology of any of these pudding projectors to the reproach of our historians, who eat so much pudding, yet have been so ungrateful to the first professor of the noble science as not to find them a place in history.

"The invention of eggs was merely accidental. Two or three having casually rolled from off a shelf into a pudding, which a good wife was making, she found herself under the necessity either of throwing away her pudding or letting the eggs remain; but concluding that the innocent quality of the eggs would do no hurt, if they did no good, she merely jumbled them all together after having carefully picked out the shells; the consequence is easily imagined, the pudding became a pudding of puddings, and the use of eggs from thence took its date. The woman was sent for to Court to make puddings for King John, who then swayed the sceptre; and gained such favour that she was the making of the whole family.

"From this time the English became so famous for puddings, that they are called pudding-eaters all over the world to this day.

"At her demise her son was taken into favour, and made the King's chief cook; and so great was his fame for puddings, that he was called Jack Pudding all over the kingdom, though in truth his real name was John Brand. This Jack Pudding, I say, became yet a greater favourite than his mother, insomuch that he had the King's ear as well as his mouth at command, for the King you must know was a mighty lover of pudding; and Jack fitted him to a hair. But what raised our hero in the esteem of this pudding-eating monarch was his second edition of pudding, he being the first that ever invented the art of broiling puddings, which he did to such perfection and so much to the King's liking (who had a mortal aversion to cold pudding) that he thereupon instituted him Knight of the Gridiron, and gave him a gridiron of gold, the ensign of that order, which he always wore as a mark of his Sovereign's favour."

## CHAPTER IV.

Steele—The Funeral—The Tatler—Contributions of Swift  
—Of Addison—Expansive Dresses — “Bodily Wit” —  
Rustic Obtuseness—Crosses in Love—Snuff-taking.

A NEW description of periodical was published in 1709, and met with deserved success. It was little more or less than the first lady's newspaper, consisting of a small half sheet printed on both sides, and sold three times a week. The price was a penny, and the form was so unpretentious that deprecators spoke of its “tobacco-paper” and “scurvy letter.” Like Defoe's review, it was strong in Foreign War intelligence, but beyond this the aim was to attract readers, not by political sarcasm or coarse jesting, but by sparkling satire on the foibles of the fashionable world. Addison says that the design was to bring philosophy to tea-tables, and to check improprieties “too trivial for the chastisement of the law, and too fantastical for the cognizance of the pulpit,” and that these papers had a “perceptible influence upon the conversation of

the time, and taught the frolic and gay to unite merriment with decency." Johnson says that previously, with the exception of the writers for the theatre, "England had no masters of common life," and considers the Italian and the French to have introduced this kind of literature. From its social character, this publication gives us a great amount of interesting information as to the manners and customs of the time, and the name "Tatler" was selected "in honour of the fair."

The originator of this enterprise, Richard Steele, was English on his father's side, Irish on his mother's. He was educated at Charterhouse, and followed much the same course as his countryman, Farquhar. He tells us gaily, "At fifteen I was sent to the University, and stayed there for some time; but a drum passing by, being a lover of music, I enlisted myself as a soldier." He seems to have been at this time ambitious of being one of those "topping fellows," of whom he afterwards spoke with so much contempt. Among the various appointments he successively obtained, was that of Gentleman Usher to Prince George, and that of Gazetteer, an office which gave him unusual facilities for affording his readers foreign intelligence. He was also Governor of the Royal Company of Comedians, and wrote plays, his best being

“The Conscious Lovers” and “The Funeral.” The latter was much liked by King William. Notwithstanding its melancholy title, it contained some good comic passages, as where the undertaker marshalls his men and puts them through a kind of rehearsal :—

*Sable.* Well, come, you that are to be mourners in this house, put on your sad looks, and walk by me that I may sort you. Ha, you! a little more upon the dismal—(*forming their countenances*)—this fellow has a good mortal look—place him near the corpse; that wainscot face must be o’ top of the stairs; that fellow’s almost in a fright (that looks as if he were full of some strange misery) at the entrance of the hall—so—but I’ll fix you all myself. Let’s have no laughing now on any provocation, (*makes faces.*) Look yonder, that hale, well-looking puppy! You ungrateful scoundrel, did not I pity you, take you out of a great man’s service, and show you the pleasure of receiving wages? Did not I give you ten, then fifteen, now twenty shillings a week to be sorrowful? and the more I give you, I think the gladder you are.

At the first commencement of the “Tatler,” Steele seems to have intended, as was usual at the time, to write almost the whole newspaper himself, and he always continued nominally to do so under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff. The only assistance he could have at all counted upon was that of Addison—his old school-fellow at Charterhouse—whose contributions proved to be very scanty. We soon find him falling short of material and calling upon the public for contributions. Thus he makes at the ends of some of the early numbers such suggestions as “Mr. Bickerstaff thanks Mr.



Quarterstaff for his kind and instructive letter," and "Any ladies, who have any particular stories of their acquaintance, which they are willing privately to make public, may send them to Isaac Bickerstaff."

This application seems to have met with some response, for although we have only before us the perpetual Isaac Bickerstaff, he soon tells us that "he shall have little to do but to publish what is sent him," and finally that some of the best pieces were not written by himself. Two or three were from the hand of Swift, who does not seem to have much appreciated the gentle periodical—says that as far as he is concerned, the editor may "fair-sex it to the world's end," and asserts with equal ill-nature and falsity that the publication was finally given up for want of materials. Probably it was to the solicitude of Addison, who was at that time employed in Ireland, that we are indebted for the few productions of Swift's bold genius which adorn this work. One of these is upon the peculiar weakness then prevalent among ladies for studding their faces with little bits of black plaster.

"Madam.—Let me beg of you to take off the patches at the lower end of your left cheek, and I will allow two more under your left eye, which will contribute more to the symmetry of your face; except you would please to remove the ten black atoms from your ladyship's chin, and wear

one large patch instead of them. If so, you may properly enough retain the three patches above mentioned.

"I am, &c."

The next describes a downfall of rain in the city.

"Careful observers may foretell the hour,  
 (By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower;  
 While rain depends, the pensive cat gives o'er  
 Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more;  
 Returning home at night you'll find the sink  
 Strike your offended nose with double stink;  
 If you be wise, then go not far to dine,  
 You'll spend in coach-hire more than save in wine,  
 A coming shower your shooting corns presage,  
 Old aches will throb, your hollow tooth will rage;  
 Sauntering in coffee-house is Dulman seen,  
 He damns the climate and complains of spleen. . . .  
 Now in contiguous drops the flood comes down,  
 Threatening with deluge this devoted town,  
 To shops in crowds the draggled females fly,  
 Pretend to cheapen goods, but nothing buy,  
 The Templar spruce, while ev'ry spout's abroad,  
 Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a coach,  
 The tuck'd up sempstress walks with hasty strides,  
 While streams run down her oil'd umbrella's sides;  
 Here various kinds, by various fortunes led,  
 Commence acquaintance underneath a shed,  
 Triumphant Tories and desponding Whigs,  
 Forget their feuds, and join to save their wigs."

The contributions of Addison were more numerous. He is more precise and old-fashioned than Steele, being particularly fond of giving a classical and mythological air to his writings, and thus we have such subjects as "The Goddess of Justice distributing rewards," and "Juno's method of retaining the affections of Jupiter." Allegories were his delight, and he tells us how artistically the probable can be intermingled with the marvellous. Such con-

ceits were then s till in fashion, and the numbers of the "Tatler" which contained them had the largest sale. They remind us of the "Old Moralities," and at this time succeeded to the prodigies, whales, plagues, and famines to which the news-writers had recourse when the exciting events of the Civil War came to an end. In general, the subjects chosen by Addison were more important than those chosen by Steele, and no doubt the earnest bent of his mind would have led him to write lofty and learned essays on morals and literature quite unsuitable to a popular periodical. But being kept down in a humbler sphere by the exigency of the case, he produced what was far more telling, and, perhaps, more practically useful. In one place he uses his humorous talent to protest, in the cause of good feeling, against the indignities put upon chaplains—a subject on which Swift could have spoken with more personal experience, but not with such good taste and light pleasantry. The article begins with a letter from a chaplain, complaining that he was not allowed to sit at table to the end of dinner, and was rebuked by the lady of the house for helping himself to a jelly. Addison remarks:—

"The case of this gentleman deserves pity, especially it he loves sweetmeats, to which, if I may guess from his letter, he is no enemy. In the meantime, I have often

wondered at the indecency of discharging the holiest men from the table as soon as the most delicious parts of the entertainments are served up, and could never conceive a reason for so absurd a custom. Is it because a liquorish palate, or a sweet-tooth, as they call it, is not consistent with the sanctity of his character? This is but a trifling pretence. No man of the most rigid virtue gives offence in any excesses of plum-pudding or plum-porridge, and that because they are the first parts of the dinner. Is there anything that tends to incitation in sweetmeats more than in ordinary dishes? Certainly not. Sugar-plums are a very innocent diet, and conserves of a much colder nature than your common pickles."

In another place speaking of the dinner table, Addison ridicules the "false delicacies" of the time. He tells us how at a great party he could find nothing eatable, and how horrified he was at being asked to partake of a young pig that had been whipped to death. Eventually, he had to finish his dinner at home, and is led to inculcate his maxim that "he keeps the greatest table who has the most valuable company at it." In another place he complains of the lateness of the dinner-hour, and asks what it will come to eventually, as it is already three o'clock!

Of the evil courses of the "wine-brewers" Addison, who lived in the world of the rich, no doubt heard frequent complaints—

"There is in this city a certain fraternity of chemical operators, who work underground in holes, caverns, and dark retirements, to conceal their mysteries from the eyes and observation of mankind. These subterraneous philosophers are daily employed in the transmutation of liquors, and, by the power of magical drugs and incantations, raising under the streets of London the choicest products of the hills and valleys of France. They can squeeze Bor-

deaux out of the sloe, and draw Champagne from an apple. Virgil in that remarkable prophecy,

‘Incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva,’

The ripening grape shall hang on every thorn.

seems to have hinted at this art, which can turn a plantation of northern hedges in a vineyard. These adepts are known among one another by the name of *wine-brewers*; and I am afraid do great injury not only to Her Majesty's customs, but to the bodies of many of her good subjects.”

After what we have seen in our own times we need not be surprised that the ladies of Addison's day revived the old “fardingales,” an expansion of dress which has always been a subject of ridicule, and probably will continue to be upon all its future appearances. The matter is first here brought forward as follows :

“The humble petition of William Jingle, Coachmaker and Chairmaker to the Liberty of Westminster.

“To Isaac Bickerstaff, Esquire, Censor of Great Britain.

“Showeth,—That upon the late invention of Mrs. Catherine Cross-stitch, Mantua-maker, the petticoats of ladies were too wide for entering into any coach or chair, which was in use before the said invention.

“That, for the service of the said ladies, your petitioner has built a round chair, in the form of a lantern, six yards and a half in circumference, with a stool in the centre of it; the said vehicle being so contrived, as to receive the passenger by opening in two in the middle, and closing mathematically when she is seated.

“That your petitioner has also invented a coach for the reception of one lady only, who is to be let in at the top.

“That the said coach has been tried by a lady's woman in one of these full petticoats, who was let down from a balcony and drawn up again by pulleys to the great satisfaction of her lady, and all who beheld her.

“Your petitioner therefore most humbly prays, that for the encouragement of ingenuity and useful inventions, he may be heard before you pass sentence upon the petticoats aforesaid. And your petitioner, &c.,”

Addison, in No. 116, proceeds to try the question :—

"The Court being prepared for proceeding on the cause of the petticoat, I gave orders to bring in a criminal, who was taken up as she went out of the puppet-show about three nights ago, and was now standing in the street with a great concourse of people about her. Word was brought me that she had endeavoured twice or thrice to come in, but could not do it by reason of her petticoat, which was too large for the entrance of my house, though I had ordered both the folding doors to be thrown open for its reception. The garment having been taken off, the accused, by a committee of matrons, was at length brought in, and "dilated so as to show it in its utmost circumference, but my great hall was too narrow for the experiment; for before it was half unfolded it described so immoderate a circle, that the lower part of it brushed upon my face as I sat in the chair of judicature." I finally ordered the vest, which stood before us, to be drawn up by a pulley to the top of my great hall, and afterwards to be spread open, in such a manner that it formed a very splendid and ample canopy over our heads, and covered the whole court of judicature with a kind of silken rotunda, in its form not unlike the cupola of St. Paul's."

A considerable part of "The Tatler" is occupied with gay attacks upon the foppery of the beaux, whom it calls "pretty fellows," or "smart fellows." The red-heeled shoes and the cane hung by its blue ribbon on the last button of the coat, came in for an especial share of ridicule. A letter purporting to be from Oxford, and reporting some improvement effected in the conversation of the University, also says:—

"I am sorry though not surprised to find that you have rallied the men of dress in vain: that the amber-headed cane still maintains its unstable post," (on the button) "that pockets are but a few inches shortened, and a beau is still a beau, from the crown of his night-cap to the heels of his shoes. For your comfort, I can assure you that your endeavours succeed better in this famous seat of learning. By them the manners of our young gentlemen are in a fair way of amendment." . . . . .

The ladies also did not escape censure for their love of finery.

"A matron of my acquaintance, complaining of her daughter's vanity, was observing that she had all of a sudden held up her head higher than ordinary, and taken an air that showed a secret satisfaction in herself, mixed with a scorn of others. 'I did not know,' says my friend, 'what to make of the carriage of this fantastical girl, until I was informed by her elder sister, that she had a pair of striped garters on.'"

Again:—

"Many a lady has fetched a sigh at the loss of a wig, and been ruined by the tapping of a snuff box. It is impossible to describe all the execution that was done by the shoulder knot, while that fashion prevailed, or to reckon up all the maidens that have fallen a sacrifice to a pair of fringed gloves. A sincere heart has not made half so many conquests as an open waistcoat: and I should be glad to see an able head make so good a figure in a woman's company as a pair of red heels. A Grecian hero, when he was asked whether he could play upon the lute, thought he had made a very good reply when he had answered 'No, but I can make a great city of a little one.' Notwithstanding his boasted wisdom, I appeal to the heart of any Toast in town whether she would not think the lutenist preferable to the statesman."

The general tone of "The Tatler," is that of a fashionable London paper, and it often notices the difference of thought in town and country. This distinction is much less now than in his day, before the time of railways, and when the country gentlemen, instead of having houses in London, betook themselves for the gay season to their county towns.

"I was this evening representing a complaint sent me out of the country by Emilia. She says, her neighbours there have so little sense of what a refined lady of the town is, that she who was a celebrated wit in London, is in that dull part of the world in so little esteem that they call her in

their base style a tongue-pad. Old Truepenny bid me advise her to keep her wit until she comes to town again, and admonish her that both wit and breeding are local; for a fine court lady is as awkward among country wives, as one of them would appear in a drawing-room."

Again :—

"I must beg pardon of my readers that, for this time I have, I fear, huddled up my discourse, having been very busy in helping an old friend out of town. He has a very good estate and is a man of wit; but he has been three years absent from town, and cannot bear a jest; for which I have with some pains convinced him that he can no more live here than if he were a downright bankrupt. He was so fond of dear London that he began to fret, only inwardly; but being unable to laugh and be laughed at, I took a place in the Northern coach for him and his family; and hope he has got to-night safe from all sneerers in his own parlour.

"To know what a Toast is in the country gives as much perplexity as she herself does in town; and indeed the learned differ very much upon the original of this word, and the acceptation of it among the moderns; however, it is agreed to have a cheerful and joyous import. A toast in a cold morning, heightened by nutmeg, and sweetened with sugar, has for many ages been given to our rural dispensers of justice before they entered upon causes, and has been of great politic use to take off the severity of their sentences; but has indeed been remarkable for one ill effect, that it inclines those who use it immoderately to speak Latin; to the admiration rather than information of an audience. This application of a toast makes it very obvious that the word may, without a metaphor, be understood as an apt name for a thing which raises us in the most sovereign degree; but many of the Wits of the last age will assert that the word in its present sense was known among them in their youth, and had its rise from an accident in the town of Bath in the reign of King Charles the Second. It happened that on a public day, a celebrated beauty of those times was in the Cross Bath, and one of the crowd of her admirers took a glass of water in which the fair one stood, and drank her health to the company. There was in the place a gay fellow half fuddled, who swore that though he liked not the liquor, he would take the toast. He was opposed in his resolution, yet this whim gave foundation to the present honor which



is due to the lady we mention in our liquors, who has ever since been called a Toast.”\*

Courtships, and the hopes and fears of Shepherds and Shepherdesses, form many tender and classic episodes throughout this periodical—

“Though Cynthio has wit, good sense, fortune, and his very being depends upon her, the termagant for whom he sighs is in love with a fellow who stares in the glass all the time he is with her, and lets her plainly see she may possibly be his rival, but never his mistress. Yet Cynthio, the same unhappy man whom I mentioned in my first narrative, pleases himself with a vain imagination that, with the language of his eyes he shall conquer her, though her eyes are intent upon one who looks from her; which is ordinary with the sex. It is certainly a mistake in the ancients to draw the little gentleman Love as a blind boy, for his real character is a little thief that squints; for ask Mrs. Meddle, who is a confidant or spy upon all the passions in the town, and she will tell you that the whole is a game of cross purposes. The lover is generally pursuing one who is in pursuit of another, and running from one that desires to meet him. Nay, the nature of this passion is so justly represented in a squinting little thief (who is always in a double action) that do but observe Clarissa next time you see her, and you will find when her eyes have made the soft tour round the company, they make no stay on him they say she is to marry, but rest two seconds of a minute on Wildair, who neither looks nor thinks of her, or any woman else. However, Cynthio had a bow from her the other day, upon which he is very much come to himself; and I heard him send his man of an errand yesterday without any manner of hesitation; a quarter of an hour after which he reckoned twenty, remembered he was to sup with a friend, and went exactly to his appointment.”

All the love-making in “The Tatler” is of a very correct description. Marriage is nowhere despised or ridiculed, though suggestions are

\* This seems taken from a Spanish story.

made for composing the troubles which sometimes accompany it:—

“A young gentleman of great estate fell desperately in love with a great beauty of very high quality, but as ill-natured as long flattery and an habitual self-will could make her. However, my young spark ventures upon her like a man of quality, without being acquainted with her, or having ever saluted her, until it was a crime to kiss any woman else. Beauty is a thing which palls with possession, and the charms of this lady soon wanted the support of good humour and complacency of manners; upon this, my spark flies to the bottle for relief from satiety; she disdains him for being tired of that for which all men envied him; and he never came home but it was, ‘Was there no sot that would stay longer?’ ‘Would any man living but you?’ ‘Did I leave all the world for this usage?’ to which he, ‘Madam, split me, you’re very impertinent!’ In a word, this match was wedlock in its most terrible appearances. She, at last weary of railing to no purpose, applies to a good uncle, who gives her a bottle he pretended he had bought of Mr. Partridge, the conjurer. ‘This,’ said he, ‘I gave ten guineas for. The virtue of the enchanted liquor (said he that sold it) is such, that if the woman you marry proves a scold (which it seems, my dear niece is your misfortune, as it was your good mother’s before you) let her hold three spoonfuls of it in her mouth for a full half hour after you come home.’”

But Steele says that his principal object was “to stem the torrent of prejudice and vice.” He did not limit himself to making amusement out of the affectation of the day; he often directed his humour to higher ends. He deprecated inconstancy, observing that a gentleman who presumed to pay attention to a lady, should bring with him a character from the one he had lately left. He must be especially commended for having been one of the first to advocate consideration for the lower animals,

and to condemn swearing and duelling. The latter, as he said, owed its continuance to the force of custom, and he supposes that if a duellist "wrote the truth of his heart," he would express himself to his lady-love in the following manner:—

"Madam,—I have so tender a regard for you and your interests that I will knock any man on the head that I observe to be of my mind, and to like you. Mr. Truman, the other day, looked at you in so languishing a manner that I am resolved to run him through to-morrow morning. This, I think, he deserves for his guilt in adoring you, than which I cannot have a greater reason for murdering him, except it be that you also approve him. Whoever says he dies for you, I will make his words good, for I will kill him,

"I am, Madam,  
"Your most obedient humble servant."

Among other offensive habits, "The Tatler" discountenances the custom of taking snuff, then common among ladies.

"I have been these three years persuading Sagissa\* to leave it off; but she talks so much, and is so learned, that she is above contradiction. However, an accident brought that about, which all my eloquence could never accomplish. She had a very pretty fellow in her closet, who ran thither to avoid some company that came to visit her; she made an excuse to go to him for some implement they were talking of. Her eager gallant snatched a kiss; but being unused to snuff, some grains from off her upper lip made him sneeze aloud, which alarmed her visitors, and has made a discovery."

[It is impossible to say what effect this ridicule produced upon the snuff-taking public, but the custom gradually declined. A hundred

\* Supposed to be Mrs. Manley, against whom Steele had a grudge.

years later, James Beresford, a fellow of Merton, places among the "Miseries of Human Life," the "Leaving off Snuff at the request of your Angel," and writes the following touching farewell.]

"Box thou art closed, and snuff is but a name!  
It is decreed my nose shall feast no more!

To me no more shall come—whence dost it come?—  
The precious pulvil from Hibernia's shore!

"Virginia, barren be thy teeming soil,  
Or may the swallowing earthquake gulf thy fields!

Fribourg and Pontet! cease your trading toil,  
Or bankruptcy be all the fruit it yields!

"And artists! frame no more in tin or gold,  
Horn, paper, silver, coal or skin, the chest,

Foredoomed in small circumference to hold  
The titillating treasures of the West!"

The fellows of Merton seem to have discovered some hidden efficacy in snuff.

"Who doth not know what logic lies concealed,  
Where diving finger meets with diving thumb?  
Who hath not seen the opponent fly the field,  
Unhurt by argument, by snuff struck dumb?

"The box drawn forth from its profoundest bed,  
The slow-repeated tap, with frowning brows.  
The brandished pinch, the fingers widely spread,  
The arm tossed round, returning to the nose.

"Who can withstand a battery so strong?  
Wit, reason, learning, what are ye to these?  
Or who would toil through folios thick and long,  
When wisdom may be purchased with a sneeze?

"Shall I, then, climb where Alps on Alps arise?  
No; snuff and science are to me a dream,  
But hold my soul! for that way madness lies,  
Love's in the scale, tobacco kicks the beam."

## CHAPTER V.

Spectator—The Rebus—Injurious Wit—The Everlasting Club—The Lovers' Club—Castles in the Air—The Guardian—Contributions by Pope—"The Agreeable Companion"—The Wonderful Magazine—Joe Miller—Pivot Humour.

WHEN "The Tatler" had completed two hundred and seventy-one numbers, it occurred to the fertile mind of Steele that it might be modified with advantage. For the future it should be a daily paper, and only contain an essay upon one subject. In making this alteration he thought it would be better to give the periodical a title of more important signification, and accordingly called it the "Spectator." But the most important difference was that Addison was to contribute a much larger portion of the material. This gave more solidity to the work.

Addison never obtained a questionable success by descending too low in coarse language. His style has been recommended as a model, for he is lively and interesting without approaching

dangerous ground. As we read his pleasant pages we can almost agree with Lord Chesterfield that:—"True wit never raised a laugh since the world was," but here and there we find a passage that shows us the grave censor was mistaken. Speaking of the "absurdities of the modern opera" Addison says,

"As I was walking in the streets about a fortnight ago, I saw an ordinary fellow carrying a cage full of little birds upon his shoulder; and as I was wondering with myself what use he would put them to, he was met very luckily by an acquaintance, who had the same curiosity. Upon his asking what he had upon his shoulder, he told him that he had been buying sparrows for the opera. 'Sparrows for the opera,' says his friend, licking his lips, 'what! are they to be roasted?' 'No, no,' says the other, 'they are to enter towards the end of the first act, and to fly about the stage.'

"There have been so many flights of sparrows let loose in this opera, that it is feared the house will never get rid of them, and that in other plays they may make their entrance in very wrong and improper scenes, so as to be seen flying in a lady's bedchamber, or perching upon a king's throne; besides the inconvenience which the heads of the audience may sometimes suffer for them. I am credibly informed that there was once a design of casting into an opera the story of Whittington and his Cat, and that in order to it there had been got together a great quantity of mice; but Mr. Rich, the proprietor of the play-house, very prudently considered that it would be impossible for the cat to kill them all, and that consequently the princes of the stage might be as much infested with mice as the prince of the island was before the cat's arrival upon it."

To a letter narrating country sports, and a whistling match won by a footman, he adds as a postscript,

"After having despatched these two important points of grinning and whistling, I hope you will oblige the world with some reflections upon yawning, as I have seen it practised on a Twelfth Night among other Christmas gam-

hols at the house of a very worthy gentleman who entertains his tenants at that time of the year. They yawn for a Cheshire cheese, and begin about midnight, when the whole company is supposed to be drowsy. He that yawns widest, and at the same time so naturally as to produce the most yawns among the spectators, carries home the cheese. If you handle this subject as you ought, I question not but your paper will set half the kingdom a-yawning, though I dare promise you it will never make anybody fall asleep."

Johnson observes that Addison never outsteps the modesty of nature, nor raises merriment or wonder by the violation of truth. He wrote several essays in the "Spectator" on wit, and condemns much that commonly passes under the name. Together with verbal humour and many absurd devices connected with it, he especially repudiates the rebus. In the first part of the following extract he refers to this device being used for other objects than those of amusement, and he might have reminded us of the alphabets of primitive times, when the picture of an animal signified the sound with which its name commenced; but the rebus proper is merely a bad attempt at humour—a sort of pictorial pun—

"I find likewise among the ancients that ingenious kind of conceit which the moderns distinguish by the name of a rebus, that does not sink a letter, but a whole word, by substituting a picture in its place. When Cæsar was one of the masters of the Roman mint, he placed the figure of an elephant upon the reverse of the public money; the word Cæsar signifying an elephant in the Punic language. This was artificially contrived by Cæsar, because it was not lawful for a private man to stamp his own figure upon the coin of the Commonwealth. Cicero, so called from the founder of his family, who was marked on the

nose with a little wen like a vetch, (which is Cicer in Latin,) instead of Marcus Tullius Cicero, ordered the words Marcus Tullius with the figure of a vetch at the end of them, to be inscribed on a public monument. This was done probably to show that he was neither ashamed of his name or family, notwithstanding the envy of his competitors had often reproached him with both. In the same manner we read of a famous building that was marked in several parts of it with the figures of a frog and a lizard; these words in Greek having been the names of the architects, who by the laws of their country were never permitted to inscribe their own names upon their works. For the same reason, it is thought that the forelock of the horse in the antique equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, represents at a distance the shape of an owl, to intimate the country of the statuary, who in all probability was an Athenian. This kind of wit was very much in vogue among our own countrymen about an age or two ago, who did not practise it for any oblique reason, as the ancients above mentioned, but purely for the sake of being witty. Among innumerable instances that may be given of this nature, I shall produce the device of one, Mr. Newberry, as I find it mentioned by our learned Camden, in his remains. Mr. Newberry, to represent his name by a picture, hung up at his door the sign of a yew-tree that had several berries upon it, and in the midst of them a great golden N hung upon the bough of the tree, which by the help of a little false spelling made up the word N-ew-berry."

Addison disproved of that severity and malice which was too common among the writers of his age. He refers to it in his essays on wit, in allusion, as it is thought, to Swift.

"There is nothing that more betrays a base ungenerous spirit than the giving of secret stabs to a man's reputation; lampoons and satires, that are written with wit and spirit, are like poisoned darts, which not only inflict a wound, but make it incurable. For this reason I am very much troubled when I see the talents of humour and ridicule in the possession of an ill-natured man. . . . It must indeed be confessed, that a lampoon or a satire does not carry in it robbery or murder; but at the same time, how many are there that would rather lose a considerable sum of money, or even life itself, than be set up as a mark of infamy and derision."



He goes on to notice how various persons behaved under the ordeal—

“When Julius Cæsar was lampooned by Catullus he invited him to supper, and treated him with such a generous civility that he made the poet his friend ever after. Cardinal Mazarin gave the same kind of treatment to the learned Guillet, who had reflected upon his Eminence in a famous Latin poem. The Cardinal sent for him, and after some kind expostulation upon what he had written, assured him of his esteem, and dismissed him with a promise of the next good Abbey that should fall, which he accordingly conferred upon him a few months after. This had so good an effect upon the author that he dedicated the second edition of his book to the Cardinal, after having expunged the passages, which had given him offence. Sextus Quintus was not of so generous and forgiving a temper. Upon his being made Pope, the statue of Pasquin was dressed in a very dirty shirt, with an excuse written under it, that he was forced to wear foul linen because his laundress was made a princess. This was a reflection upon the Pope’s sister, who, before the promotion of her brother, was in those mean circumstances that Pasquin represented her. As this pasquinade made a great noise in Rome, the Pope offered a considerable sum of money to any person that should discover the author of it. The author relying on his Holiness’ generosity, as also upon some private overtures he had received from him, made the discovery himself; upon which the Pope gave him the reward he had promised, but at the same time to disable the satirist for the future, ordered his tongue to be cut out, and both his hands to be chopped off.”

When Addison treats of the ladies’ “com-mode,” a lofty head-dress which had been in fashion in his time, he adds reflections which may moderate all such vanities—

“There is not so variable a thing in nature as a lady’s head-dress. Within my own memory I have known it rise and fall above thirty degrees. About ten years ago it shot up to a very great height, inasmuch as the female part of our species were much taller than the men. The women were of such an enormous stature that ‘we appeared as grasshoppers before them.’ At present, the whole sex is in a manner dwarfed and shrunk into a race of beauties that

seems almost another species. I remember several ladies who were once very near seven feet high, that at present want some inches of five. . . . I would desire the fair sex to consider how impossible it is for them to add anything that can be ornamental to what is already the master-piece of Nature. The head has the most beautiful appearance, as well as the highest station in a human figure. Nature has laid out all her art in beautifying the face; she has touched it with vermillion, planted in it a double row of ivory, made it the seat of smiles and blushes, lighted it up, and enlivened it with the brightness of the eyes, hung it on each side with curious organs of sense, given it airs and graces that cannot be described, and surrounded it with such a flowing shade of hair as sets all its beauties in the most agreeable light. In short, she seems to have designed the head as the cupola to the most glorious of her works; and when we load it with such a pile of supernumerary ornaments, we destroy the symmetry of the human figure, and foolishly contrive to call off the eye from great and real beauties, to childish gewgaws, ribbands, and bone-lace."

But the popularity of "The Spectator" was not a little due to the stronger and more daring genius of Steele. His writing, though not so didactic, or so ripe in style, as that of Addison, was antithetical, sparkling, and more calculated to "raise a horse."

The continuation of the periodical, which was carried on by others, was not equally successful. In the earlier volumes we recognise Steele's hand in the Essays on "Clubs." He gives us an amusing account of the "Ugly Club," for which no one was eligible who had not "a visible quearity in his aspect, or peculiar cast of countenance;" and of the "Everlasting Club," which was to sit day and night from one end of the year to another; no party pre-

suming to rise till they were relieved by those who were in course to succeed them.

“This club was instituted towards the end of the Civil Wars, and continued without interruption till the time of the Great Fire, which burnt them out and dispersed them for several weeks. The steward at this time maintained his post till he had been like to have been blown up with a neighbouring house (which was demolished in order to stop the fire) and would not leave the chair at last, till he had emptied all the bottles upon the table, and received repeated directions from the Club to withdraw himself.”

The following on “Castles in the Air” is interesting, as Steele himself seems to have been addicted to raising such structures,—

“A castle-builder is even just what he pleases, and as such I have grasped imaginary sceptres, and delivered uncontrollable edicts from a throne to which conquered nations yielded obeisance. I have made I know not how many inroads into France, and ravaged the very heart of that kingdom; I have dined in the Louvre, and drunk champagne at Versailles; and I would have you take notice I am not only able to vanquish a people already ‘cowed’ and accustomed to flight, but I could Almanzor-like, drive the British general from the field, were I less a Protestant, or had ever been affronted by the confederates. There is no art or profession whose most celebrated masters I have not eclipsed. Wherever I have afforded my salutary presence, fevers have ceased to burn and agues to shake the human fabric. When an eloquent fit has been upon me, an apt gesture and a proper cadence has animated each sentence, and gazing crowds have found their passions worked up into rage, or soothed into a calm. I am short, and not very well made; yet upon sight of a fine woman, I have stretched into proper stature, and killed with a good air and mien. These are the gay phantoms that dance before my waking eyes and compose my day-dreams. I should be the most contented happy man alive, were the chimerical happiness which springs from the paintings of Fancy less fleeting and transitory. But alas! it is with grief of mind I tell you, the least breath of wind has often demolished my magnificent edifices, swept away my groves, and left me no more trace of them

than if they had never been. My exchequer has sunk and vanished by a rap on my door ; the salutation of a friend has cost me a whole continent, and in the same moment I have been pulled by the sleeve, my crown has fallen from my head. The ill consequences of these reveries is inconceivably great, seeing the loss of imaginary possessions makes impressions of real woe. Besides bad economy is visible and apparent in the builders of imaginary mansions. My tenants' advertisements of ruins and dilapidations often cast a damp over my spirits, even in the instant when the sun, in all his splendour, gilds my Eastern palaces."

In marking the differences between the humour at the time of "The Spectator" and that of the present day, we feel happy that the tone of society has so altered that such jests as the following would be quite inadmissible.

"Mr. Spectator,—As you are spectator general, I apply myself to you in the following case, viz.: I do not wear a sword, but I often divert myself at the theatre, when I frequently see a set of fellows pull plain people, by way of humour and frolic, by the nose, upon frivolous or no occasion. A friend of mine the other night applauding what a graceful exit Mr. Wilks made, one of those wringers overhearing him, pinched him by the nose. I was in the pit the other night (when it was very much crowded); a gentleman leaning upon me, and very heavily, I very civilly requested him to remove his hand, for which he pulled me by the nose. I would not resent it in so public a place, because I was unwilling to create a disturbance: but have since reflected upon it as a thing that is unmanly and disingenuous, renders the nose-puller odious, and makes the person pulled by the nose look little and contemptible. This grievance I humbly request you will endeavour to redress. I am, &c., JAMES EASY.

"I have heard of some very merry fellows among whom the frolic was started, and passed by a great majority, that every man should immediately draw a tooth: after which they have gone in a body and smoked a cobler. The same company at another night has each man burned his cravat, and one, perhaps, whose estate would bear it, has thrown a long wig and laced hat into the fire. Thus they have jested themselves stark naked, and run into the streets and frightened the people very successfully. There is no inhabitant of any standing in Covent Garden, but can tell

you a hundred good humours where people have come off with a little bloodshed, and yet scoured all the witty hours of the night. I know a gentleman that has several wounds in the head by watch-poles, and has been twice run through the body to carry on a good jest. He is very old for a man of so much good humour; but to this day he is seldom merry, but he has occasion to be valiant at the same time. But, by the favour of these gentlemen, I am humbly of opinion that a man may be a very witty man, and never offend one statute of this kingdom."

More harmless was the joking of Villiers, the last Duke of Buckingham, (father of Lady Mary Wortley Montague), who seems to have inherited some of the family humour. Addison tells us,

"One of the wits of the last age, who was a man of a good estate, thought he never laid out his money better than on a jest. As he was one year at Bath, observing that in the great confluence of fine people there were several among them with long chins, a part of the visage by which he himself was very much distinguished, he invited to dinner half a score of these remarkable persons, who had their mouths in the middle of their faces. They had no sooner placed themselves about the table, but they began to stare upon one another, not being able to imagine what had brought them together. Our English proverb says:

"Tis merry in the hall  
When beards wag all."

"It proved so in the assembly I am now speaking of, who seeing so many peaks of faces agitated with eating, drinking and discourse, and observing all the chins that were present meeting together very often over the centre of the table, every one grew sensible of the jest, and came into it with so much good humour that they lived in strict friendship and alliance from that day forward."

In August, 1712, a tax of a halfpenny was placed upon newspapers, and led to several leading journals being discontinued, a failure facetiously termed "the fall of the leaf." "The

*Spectator*” survived the loss, but not unshaken, and the price was raised to two-pence. It seems strange that such an addition should affect a periodical of this character, but a penny was a larger sum then than it is now. Steele says, “the ingenious J. W. (Dr. Walker, Head-Master of the Charterhouse) tells me that I have deprived him of the best part of his breakfast, for that since the rise of my paper, he is forced every morning to drink his dish of coffee by itself, without the addition of ‘*The Spectator*,’ that used to be better than lace (*i.e.*, brandy) to it.”

After “*The Spectator*” had run through six hundred and thirty-five numbers, Steele, with his usual restlessness, discontinued it, or rather, changed its name, and called it “*The Guardian*.” He commenced writing this new periodical by himself, but soon obtained the assistance of Addison. The only feature worth notice in which it differed from its predecessor, was the prominent appearance of Pope as an essayist, although from political reasons he would have preferred to have been an anonymous contributor. Among his articles we may notice a powerful one against cruelty to animals and field sports in general. Another was an ironical attack upon the Pastorals of Ambrose Philips comparing them with his own, and affords

an illustration of what we observed in another place, that such modes of warfare are easily misunderstood—for the essay having been sent to Steele anonymously, he hesitated to publish it lest Pope should be offended! But his best article in this periodical is directed against poetasters in general—whom he never treated with much mercy. He says that poetry is now composed upon mechanical principles, in the same way that house-wives make plum-puddings—

“What Molière observes of making a dinner, that any man can do it with money, and if a professed cook cannot without, he has his art for nothing; the same may be said of making a poem, it is easier brought about by him that has a genius, but the skill lies in doing it without one. In pursuance of this end, I shall present the reader with a plain and certain recipe, by which even sonneteers and ladies may be qualified for this grand performance.”

He then proceeds to give a “receipt to make an epic poem,” and after giving directions for the “fable,” the “manners,” and the “machines,” he comes to the “descriptions.”

“*For a Tempest.*—Take Eurus, Zephyr, Auster, and Boreas, and cast them together in one verse. Add to these of rain, lightning, and of thunder (the loudest you can,) *quantum sufficit*. Mix your clouds and billows well together until they foam, and thicken your description here and there with a quicksand. Brew your tempest well in your head before you set it a blowing.

“*For a Battle.*—Pick a large quantity of images and descriptions from Homer’s ‘*Iliad*,’ with a spice or two of Virgil, and if there remain any overplus, you may lay them by for a skirmish. Season it well with simiters, and it will make an excellent battle.

“*For the Language*—(I mean the diction.) Here it will do well to be an imitator of Milton, for you will find it

easier to imitate him in this, than in anything else. Hebraisms and Grecisms are to be found in him without the trouble of learning the languages. I knew a painter who (like our poet) had no genius, make his daubings to be thought originals by setting them in the smoke. You may in the same manner give the venerable air of antiquity to your piece, by darkening it up and down with old English. With this you may be easily furnished upon any occasion by the dictionary commonly printed at the end of Chaucer.

"I must not conclude without cautioning all writers without genius in one material point, which is, never to be afraid of having too much fire in their works. I should advise rather to take their warmest thoughts, and spread them abroad upon paper; for they are observed to cool before they are read."

In an article on laughter by Dr. Birch, Prebendary of Worcester, we have the following fanciful list of those who indulge in it:—

"The dimplers, the smilers, the laughers, the grimacers, the horse-laughers.

"The dimple is practised to give a grace to the features, and is frequently made a bait to entangle a gazing lover; this was called by the ancients the chin laugh.

"The smile is for the most part confined to the fair sex and their male retinue. It expresses our satisfaction in a silent sort of approbation, doth not too much disorder the features, and is practised by lovers of the most delicate address. This tender motion of the physignomy the ancients called the Ionic laugh,

"The laugh among us is the common risus of the ancients. The grin by writers of antiquity is called the Syncrusian, and it was then, as it is at this time, made use of to display a beautiful set of teeth.

"The horse-laugh, or the sardonic, is made use of with great success in all kinds of disputation. The proficient in this kind, by a well-timed laugh, will baffle the most solid argument. This upon all occasions supplies the want of reason, is always received with great applause in coffee-house disputes, and that side the laugh joins with is generally observed to gain the better of his antagonist."

In an amusing article upon punning, he



gives the following instance of its beneficial effects :—

“ A friend of mine who had the ague this Spring was, after the failing of several medicines and charms, advised by me to enter into a course of quibbling. He threw his electuaries out of his window, and took Abracadabra off from his neck, and by the mere force of punning upon that long magical word, threw himself into a fine breathing sweat, and a quiet sleep. He is now in a fair way of recovery, and says pleasantly, he is less obliged to the Jesuits for their powder, than for their equivocation.”

Several periodicals of a similar character were afterwards published by Steele and others, but they wanted the old “salt,” and were not equally successful.

Thus, in 1745, a humorous periodical of a somewhat different character was attempted, which went through eight weekly numbers. It was called “The Agreeable Companion, or an Universal Medley of Wit and Good Humour.” There was little original matter in it, but the proprietor recognized the desirability of having pieces by various hands, and so made long extracts from Prior, Gay, and Fenton. Although there was a considerable number of epitaphs, riddles, and fables, nearly all the jests were well known and trite. But the subjoined have a certain amount of neatness.

TO DORCAS.

“ Oh ! what bosom must but yield,  
When like Pallas you advance,  
With a thimble for your shield,  
And a needle for your lance ;

Fairest of the stitching train,  
Ease my passion by your art,  
And in pity to my pain,  
Mend the hole that's in my heart,"

TO SALLY, AT THE CHOP-HOUSE.

"Dear Sally, emblem of thy chop-house ware,  
As broth reviving, and as white bread fair;  
As small beer grateful, and as pepper strong,  
As beef-steak tender, as fresh pot-herbs young;  
Sharp as a knife, and piercing as a fork,  
Soft as new butter, white as fairest pork;  
Sweet as young mutton, brisk as bottled beer,  
Smooth as is oil, juicy as cucumber,  
And bright as cruet void of vinegar.  
O, Sally! could I turn and shift my love  
With the same skill that you your steaks can move,  
My heart, thus cooked, might prove a chop-house feast,  
And you alone should be the welcome guest.  
But, dearest Sal! the flames that you impart,  
Like chop on gridiron, broil my tender heart!  
Which if thy kindly helping hand be n't nigh,  
Must like an up-turned chop, hiss, brown, and fry;  
And must at least, thou scorcher of my soul,  
Shrink, and become an undistinguished coal."

As the idea gradually gained ground that it would be necessary that the public, or a considerable number of writers, should take part in the literary work of a periodical, we now find a more important and promising publication called a magazine, and having the grand title of "The Wonderful Magazine!" It went through three monthly numbers in 1764. Even this was not intended to be exclusively humorous, but was to contain light stories as well as paradoxes and inquiries; the editor observing in the introduction that "a tailor's pattern-book must consist of various colours and various cloths; and what one thinks

fashionable, another deems ridiculous." To help the new enterprise, an incentive to emulation was proposed by the offer of two silver medals, one for the most humorous tale, and the other for the best answer to a prize enigma.

The Magazine contained a long story of enchantments, a dramatic scene full of conflicts and violence, some old *bons mots*, and pieces of indifferent poetry. The editor had evidently no good source to draw from, and the best pieces in the work are the following:—

"Belinda has such wondrous charms,  
'Tis heaven to be within her arms;  
And she's so charitably given,  
She wishes all mankind in heaven."

and

*A copy of Verses on Mr. Day,  
Who from his Landlord ran away.*

"Here Day and Night conspired a sudden flight,  
For Day, they say, is run away by Night,  
Day's past and gone. Why, landlord, where's your rent?  
Did you not see that Day was almost spent?  
Day pawned and sold, and put off what we might,  
Though it be ne'er so dark, Day will be light;  
You had one Day a tenant, and would fain  
Your eyes could see that Day but once again.  
No, landlord, no; now you may truly say  
(And to your cost, too,) you have lost the Day.  
Day is departed in a mist; I fear,  
For Day is broke, and yet does not appear.

But how, now, landlord, what's the matter, pray?  
What! you can't sleep, you long so much for Day?  
Cheer up then, man; what though you've lost a sum,  
Do you not know that pay-day yet will come?  
I will engage, do you but leave your sorrow,  
My life for yours, Day comes again to-morrow;  
And for your rent—never torment your soul,  
You'll quickly see Day peeping through a hole."

Births, deaths, and marriages are recorded in this Magazine, under such headings as "The Merry Gossips," "'The Kissing Chronicle,'" and "The Undertaker's Harvest-Home," or "The Squallers—a tragi-comedy," "All for Love," and "Act V. Scene the Last."

It seems to have been more easy at that time to collect wonders than witticisms—perhaps also the former were more appreciated, for the "Wonderful Magazine" was re-commenced in 1793, and went through sixty weekly numbers. It was intended to be humorous as well as marvellous, but the latter element predominated. Here we have accounts and engravings of witches, and of men remarkable for height and corpulence, for mental gifts or strange habits—a man is noticed who never took off his clothes for forty years. One of the most interesting biographies is that of Thomas Britton, known as "the musical small-coal man," who started the first musical society, and, notwithstanding his lowly calling, had great wit and literary attainments, and was intimate with Handel, and many noblemen. Probably he would not have obtained a place in this Magazine but for the circumstances of his death. There was, it seems, one Honeyman, a blacksmith, who was a ventriloquist, and could speak with his mouth closed. He was

introduced to Britton, and, by way of a joke, told him in a sepulchral voice that he should die in a few hours. Britton never recovered the shock, but died a few days afterwards in 1714.

Among the humorous pieces in this Magazine, we have :—

A DREADFUL SIGHT.

I saw a peacock with a fiery tail  
I saw a comet drop down hail  
I saw a cloud begirt with ivy round  
I saw a sturdy oak creep on the ground  
I saw a pismire swallow up a whale  
I saw the sea brimful of ale  
I saw a Venice glass full six feet deep  
I saw a well filled with men's tears that weep  
I saw men's eyes all in a flame of fire  
I saw a house high as the moon and higher  
I saw the sun even at midnight  
I saw the man who saw this dreadful sight.

There are a few amusing anecdotes in it, such as that about Alphonso, King of Naples. It says that he had a fool who recorded in a book the follies of the great men of the Court. The king sent a Moor in his household to the Levant to buy horses, for which he gave him ten thousand ducats, and the fool marked this as a piece of folly. Some time afterwards the king asked for the book to look over it, was surprised to find his own name, and asked why it was there. "Because," said the jester, "you have entrusted your money to one you are never likely to see again." "But if he does come again," demanded the king, "and brings me the horses, what folly have I committed?"

"Well, if he does return," replied the fool, "I'll blot out your name and put in his."

We also find some puns remarkable for an absurdity so extravagant as to be noteworthy. There is a string of derivations of names of places constructed in the following manner:—

"When the seamen on board the ship of Christopher Columbus came in sight of San Salvador, they burst out into exuberant mirth and jollity. 'The lads are in a merry key,' cried the commodore. America is now the name of half the globe.

"The city of Albany was originally settled by Scotch people. When strangers on their arrival there asked how the new comers did, the answer was 'All bonny.' The spelling is now a little altered but the sound is the same.

"When the French first settled on the banks of the river St. Lawrence, they were stinted by the intendant, Monsieur Picard, to a can of spruce beer a day. The people thought this measure very scant, and were constantly exclaiming, 'Can-a-day!' It would be ungenerous of any reader to require a more rational derivation of the word Canada."

No name is more familiar to us in connection with humour than that of "Joe" (Josias) Miller. He was well known as a comedian, between 1710 and 1738, and had considerable natural talent, but was unable to read. He owes his celebrity to popular jest books having been put forward in his name soon after his death.\* It was common at that time, as we have seen in the case of Scogan, for compilers to seek to give currency to their humorous collections by attributing them to some celebrated wit of the

\* He was buried in Portugal Street graveyard, but was removed in 1853 on the erection of the new buildings of King's College Hospital.

day. To Jo Miller was attributed the humour most effective at the period in which he lived, and it has since passed as a byword for that which is broad and pointless. Sometimes it merely suggests staleness, and I have heard it said that he must have been the cleverest man in the world, for nobody ever heard a good story related that someone did not afterwards say that it was "a Jo Miller."

A question may here be raised whether these humorous sayings, which are similar in all ages, have been handed down or re-invented over and over again. It must be admitted that the minds of men have a tendency to move in the same direction, and may have struck upon the same points in ages widely separated. In reading general literature, we constantly find the same thought suggesting itself to different writers, and I have known two people, who had no acquaintance with each other, make precisely the same joke—original in both cases. On the other hand, the rarity of genuine humour has given a permanent character to many clever sayings, and there has always been a demand for them to enliven the convivial and social intercourse of mankind. Their subtlety—the small points on which they turn—makes it difficult to remember them, but there will be always some men, who will treasure them for

the delectation of their friends. It is remarkable that people are never tired of repeating humorous sayings, though they are soon wearied of hearing a repetition of them by others. A man who cannot endure to hear a joke three times, will keep telling the same one over and over all his life, and but for this, fewer good stories would survive. The pleasure derived from humour, while it lasts, is greater than that from sentiment or wisdom ; hence we repeat it more in daily converse than poetry or proverbs, and the constant reproduction of it until it is reduced to a mere phantom, causes its influence to appear more transient than it is.

And hence, although humour is generally "fleeting as the flowers," some of the jests, which pass with us as new, are more than two thousand years old. Porson said that he could trace back all the "Joe Millers" to a Greek origin. The domestic cat—the cause of many of our household calamities—was in full activity in the days of Aristophanes. Then, as now, mourners had recourse to the friendly onion ; and if Pythagoreans had never dreamed of a donkey becoming a man, they had often known a man to become a donkey. If they were not able to skin a flint, they knew well what was meant by "skinning a flayed dog,"



and "shearing an ass." These and similar sayings, being of a simple character, may have been due to the same thought occurring to different minds, and this may be the case even where there is more point; thus, "an ass laden with gold will get into the strongest fortress," has been attributed to Frederick the Great and to Napoleon, and may have been due to both. The saying "Treat a friend as though he would one day become an enemy," has been attributed to Lord Chesterfield, to Publius Syrus, and even to Bias, one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece. Many may exclaim, "Perish those who have said our good things before us!"

But where the saying is very remarkable, or depends on some peculiar circumstances, we may conclude that there is one original, and that upon this pivot a number of different names and characters have been made to revolve. It has been ascribed to or appropriated by many. We have read of two eminent comic writers in classical times dying of laughter at seeing an ass eat figs. Here it is most probable that there was some standing joke upon this subject, or that some instance of the kind occurred, and so this strange death came to be attributed to several individuals. The saying,

“On two days is a wife enjoyable,  
That of her bridal and her burial,”  
attributed to Palladas in the fifth century A.D.,  
was really due to Hipponax in the fifth  
century B.C.

There is a story that Lord Stair was so like Louis XIV. that, when he went to the French Court, the King asked him whether his mother was ever in France, and that he replied “No, your Majesty, but my father was.” This is in reality a Roman story, and the answer was made to Augustus by a young man from the country.

Sydney Smith’s reply when it was proposed to pave the approach to St. Paul’s with blocks of wood, “The canons have only to put their heads together and it will be done,” was not original; Rochester had made a similar remark to Charles II. when he noticed a construction near Shoreditch: and the story of the man who complained that the chicken brought up for his dinner had only one leg, and was told to go and look into the roost-house, is to be found in an old Turkish jest-book of the fifteenth century. When Byron said of Southey’s poems that “they would be read when Homer and Virgil were forgotten—but not till then,” he was no doubt repeating what Porson said of Sir Richard Blackmore’s. “Most literary stories,” observes Mr. Willmott, “seem to be shadows, brighter or fainter, of others told before.

## CHAPTER VI.

Sterne—His Versatility—Dramatic Form—Indelicacy—  
Sentiment and Geniality—Letters to his Wife—Extracts  
from his Sermons—Dr. Johnson.

STERNE exceeded Smollett\* in indelicacy as much as in humorous talent. He calls him Smelfungus, because he had written a fastidious book of travels. But he profited by his works, and the character of Uncle Toby reminds us considerably of Commodore Truncheon. But Sterne is more immediately associated in our minds with Swift, for both were clergymen, and both Irishmen by birth, though neither by parentage. Sterne's great-grandfather had been Archbishop of York, and his mother heiress of Sir Roger Jacques, of Elvington in Yorkshire. Through family interest Sterne became a Prebendary of York, and obtained two livings; at one of which he spent his time in quiet obscurity until his forty-seventh year, when the production of "Tristram Shandy" made him famous. He did not long

\* Smollett, of whom we shall speak in the next chapter, published before Sterne, though a younger man.

enjoy his laurels, dying nine years afterwards in 1768.

In both Sterne and Swift, as well as Congreve, we see the fertile erratic fancy of Ireland improved by the labour and reflection of England. Sterne's humour was inferior to Swift's, narrower and smaller; it was a sparkling wine, but light-bodied, and often bad in colour. His pleasantry had no depth or general bearing. He appealed to the senses, referred entirely to some particular and trivial coincidence, and often put amatory weaknesses under contribution to give it force. The current of his thoughts glided naturally and imperceptibly into poetry and humour, but his subject matter was not intellectual, though he sometimes showed fine emotional feeling.

Under the head of acoustic humour we may place that abruptness of style which he managed so adroitly, and that dramatic punctuation, which he may be said to have invented, and of which no one ever else made so much use. No doubt he was an accomplished speaker; and we know that he had a good ear for music.

There is something in Sterne which reminds us of a conjurer exhibiting tricks on the stage; in one place indeed, he speaks of his cap and bells, and no doubt many would have thought

them more suitable to him than a cap and gown. He was a versatile man ; fond of light and artistic pursuits, occupying, as he tells us, his leisure time with books, painting, fiddling, and shooting." In his nature there was much emotion and exuberance of mind, being that of an accomplished rather than of a thoughtful man ; and we can believe when he avers that he "said a thousand things he never dreamed of." He had not sufficient foundation for humour of the highest kind ; but in form and diction he was unrivalled. Perhaps this was why Thackeray said "he was a great jester, not a great humorist." But he had a dashing style, and the quick succession of ideas necessary for a successful author. Not only was he master of writing, but of the kindred art of rhetoric. He makes a correction in the accentuation of Corporal Trim, who begins to read a sermon with the text,—

*"For we trust we have a good conscience. Heb. xiii., 8.*  
'TRUST! Trust we have a good conscience!!' 'Certainly,' Trim, quoth my father, interrupting him, 'you give that sentence a very improper accent, for you curl up your nose, man, and read it with such a sneering tone, as if the parson was going to abuse the apostle.'"

The same kind of discrimination is shown in the following—

"'And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night?' 'Oh, against all rule, my lord—most ungrammatically. Betwixt the substantive and the adjective, which should agree together in number, case, and gender, he made a breach thus, stopping, as if the point wanted settling; and

betwixt the nominative case, which your lordship knows should govern the verb, he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times, three seconds and three-fifths by a stop watch, my lord, each time.' 'Admirable grammarism!' 'But in suspending his voice, was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm? Was the eye silent? Did you narrowly look?' 'I looked only at the stop watch, my lord.' 'Excellent observer!'"

His sensibility and taste in this direction was probably one of the bonds of the close intimacy, which existed between himself and David Garrick.

We find among his works, numerous instances of his peculiar and artistic punctuation. Sometimes he continues an exclamation by means of dashes for three lines. Sometimes, by way of pause, he leaves out a whole page, and the first time he does this he humorously adds:—"Thrice happy book! thou wilt have one page which malice cannot blacken." One of the chapters of *Tristram* begins—

"And a chapter it shall have."

"A sermon commences—Judges xix. 1. 2. 3.

"And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of Mount Ephraim, who took unto himself a concubine."

"A concubine! but the text accounts for it, for in those days 'there was no king in Israel!' then the Levite, you will say, like every other man in it, did what was right in his own eyes; and so, you may add, did his concubine too, for she went away."

Another from *Ecclesiastes*—

“‘It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.’—*Eccl.* vii. 2.

“That I deny—but let us hear the wise man’s reasoning for it:—‘for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart; sorrow is better than laughter,’ for a crack-brained order of enthusiastic monks, I grant, but not for men of the world.’”

Of course, he introduces this cavil to combat it, but still maintains that travellers may be allowed to amuse themselves with the beauties of the country they are passing through.

The following represents his arrival in the Paris of his day—

“Crack, crack! crack, crack! crack, crack!—so this is Paris! quoth I,—and this is Paris!—humph!—Paris! cried I, repeating the name the third time.”

“The first, the finest, the most brilliant!

“The streets, however, are nasty.

“But it looks, I suppose, better than it smells. Crack, crack! crack, crack! what a fuss thou makest! as if it concerned the good people to be informed that a man with a pale face, and clad in black had the honour to be driven into Paris at nine o’clock at night, by a postillion in a tawny yellow jerkin, turned up with a red calamanco! Crack! crack! crack! crack! crack! I wish thy whip—But it is the spirit of the nation; so crack, crack on.”

Here is another instance;—

“Ptr—r—r—ing—twing—twang—prut—trut;—’tis a cursed bad fiddle. Do you know whether my fiddle’s in tune or no?—trut—prut. They should be fifths. ’Tis wickedly strung—tr—a, e, i, o, u, twang. The bridge is a mile too high, and the sound post absolutely down,—else,—trut—prut.

“Hark! ’tis not so bad in tone. Diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, dum. There is nothing in playing before good judges; but there’s a man there—no, not him with the bundle under his arm—the grave man in black,—’sdeath! not the man with the sword on. Sir, I had rather play a capriccio to Calliope herself than draw my bow across my fiddle before that very man; and yet I’ll stake my Cremona to a Jew’s trump, which is the greatest

odds that ever were laid, that I will this moment stop three hundred and fifty leagues out of time upon my fiddle without punishing one single nerve that belongs to him. Twiddle diddle,—tweddle diddle,—twiddle diddle,—twoddle diddle,—twiddle diddle;—prut-trut—krish—krash—krush,—I've outdone yon, Sir, but you see he's no worse; and was Apollo to take his fiddle after me, he can make him no better. Diddle diddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle,—ham—dum—drum.

"Your worships and your reverences love music, and God has made you all with good ears, and some of you play delightfully yourselves; trut-prut—prut-trut."

In the following passages we may also observe that peculiar neat and dramatic form of expression for which Sterne was remarkable.

"'Are we not,' continued Corporal Trim, looking still at Susanah—'Are we not like a flower of the field?' A tear of pride stole in betwixt every two tears of humiliation—else no tongue could have described Susanah's affliction—'Is not all flesh grass?'—'Tis clay—'tis dirt.' They all looked directly at the scullion;—the scullion had been just scouring a fish kettle—It was not fair.

"'What is the finest face man ever looked at?' 'I could hear Trim talk so for ever,' cried Susanah, 'What is it?' Susanah laid her head on Trim's shoulder—'but corruption!'—Susanah took it off.

"Now I love you for this;—and 'tis this delicious mixture within you, which makes you dear creatures what you are;—and he, who hates you for it—all I can say of the matter is—that he has either a pumpkin for his head. or a pippin for his heart. . . . ."

"Wanting the remainder of a fragment of paper on which he found an amusing story, he asked his French servant for it; La Fleur said he had wrapped it round the stalks of a bouquet, which he had given to his *demoiselle* upon the Boulevards. 'Then, prithee, La Fleur,' said I 'step back to her, and see if thou canst get it.' 'There is no doubt of it,' said La Fleur, and away he flew.

"In a very little time the poor fellow came back quite out of breath, with deeper marks of disappointment in his looks than would arise from the simple irreparability of the payment. *Juste ciel!* in less than two minutes that the poor fellow had taken his last farewell of her—his faithless mistress had given his *gage d'amour* to one of the Count's



footmen—the footman to a young sempstress—and the sempstress to a fiddler, with my fragment at the end of it. Our misfortunes were involved together—I gave a sigh, and La Fleur echoed it back to my ear. ‘How perfidious!’ cried La Fleur, ‘How unlucky,’ said I.

“I should not have been mortified, Monsieur,” quoth La Fleur, ‘If she had lost it.’

“Nor I, La Fleur,” said I, ‘had I found it.’”

We very commonly form our opinion of an Author’s character from his writings, and there is no doubt that his tendencies can scarcely fail to betray themselves to a careful observer. But experience has generally taught him to curb or quicken his feelings according to the notions of the public taste, so that he often expresses the sentiments of others rather than his own. Hence a literary friend once observed to me that a man is very different from what his writings would lead you to suppose. I think there are certain indications in Sterne’s writings that he introduced those passages to which objection was justly taken for the purpose of catching the favour of the public. He had already published some Sermons, which, he says, “found neither purchasers nor readers.”

Conscious of his talent, and being no doubt reminded of it by his friends, he wished to obtain a field for it, and determined now to try a different course. He wrote “*Tristram Shandy*” as he says “not to be fed, but to be famous,”

and so just was the opinion of what would please the age in which he lived that we find the quiet country rector suddenly transformed into the most popular literary man of the day,—going up to London and receiving more invitations than he could accept. He had made his gold current by a considerable admixture of alloy; and endeavoured to excuse his offences of this kind by a variety of subterfuges. Upon one occasion, he compared them to the antics of children which although unseemly, are performed with perfect innocence.

Of course this was a jest. Sterne was not living in a Paradisaical age, and he intentionally overstept the boundaries of decorum. But granting he had an object in view, was he justified in adopting such means to obtain it? certainly not; but he had some right to laugh, as he does, at the inconsistency of the public, who, while they blamed his books, bought up the editions of them as fast as they could be issued.

If Sterne's humour was often offensive, we must in justice admit it was never cynical. Had it possessed more satire it would have, perhaps, been more instructive, but there was a bright trait in Sterne's character, that he never

accused others. On the contrary, he censures men who, "wishing to be thought witty, and despairing of coming honestly by the title, try to affect it by shrewd and sarcastic reflections upon whatever is done in the world. This is setting up trade with the broken stock of other people's failings—perhaps their misfortunes—so, much good may it do them with what honour they can get—the farthest extent of which, I think, is to be praised, as we do some sauces—with tears in our eyes. It has helped to give a bad name to wit, as if the main essence of it was satire."

Sterne had no personal enmities ; his faults were all on the amiable side, nor can we imagine a selfish cold-hearted sensualist writing "Dear Sensibility, source inexhausted by all that is precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows." His letters to his wife before their marriage exhibit the most tender and beautiful sentiments ;—

"My L—— talks of leaving the country ; may a kind angel guide thy steps hither—Thou sayest thou wilt quit the place with regret ;—I think I see you looking twenty times a day at the house—almost counting every brick and pane of glass, and telling them at the same time with a sigh, you are going to leave them—Oh, happy modification of matter ! they will remain insensible to thy loss. But how wilt thou be able to part with thy garden ? the recollection of so many pleasant walks must have endeared it to you. The trees, the shrubs, the flowers, which thou reared with thy own hands, will they not droop, and fade away

sooner upon thy departure? Who will be thy successor to raise them in thy absence? Thou wilt leave thy name upon the myrtle tree—If trees, shrubs, and flowers could compose an elegy, I should expect a very plaintive one on this subject.”

In the course of one of his sermons he writes very characteristically—

“Let the torpid monk seek heaven comfortless and alone, God speed him! For my own part, I fear I should never so find the way; let me be wise and religious, but let me be man; wherever Thy Providence places me, or whatever be the road I take to get to Thee, give me some companion in my journey, be it only to remark to. ‘How our shadows lengthen as the sun goes down,’ to whom I may say, ‘How fresh is the face of nature! How sweet the flowers of the field! How delicious are these fruits!’”

We believe these to have been sincere expressions—inside his motley garb he had a heart of tenderness. It went forth to all, even to the animal world—to the caged starling. Some may attribute the ebullitions of feeling in his works to affectation, but those who have read them attentively will observe the same impulses too generally predominant to be the work of design. The story of the prisoner Le Fevre and of Maria bear the brightest testimony to his character in this respect. What sentiments can surpass in poetic beauty or religious feeling that in which he commends the distraught girl to the beneficence of the Almighty who “tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.”

We have no proof that Sterne was a dissipated man. He expressly denies it in a letter

written shortly before his death, and in another, he says, "The world has imagined because I wrote '*Tristram Shandy*,' that I myself was more Shandean than I really was." In his day many, not only of the laity, but of the clergy, thought little of indulging in coarse jests, and of writing poetry which contained much more wit than decency. Sterne having lived in retirement until 1759, must have had a feeble constitution, for in the Spring of 1762 he broke a blood vessel, and again in the same Autumn he "bled the bed full," owing, as he says, to the temperature of Paris, which was "as hot as Nebuchadnezzar's oven." He complains of the fatigue of writing and preaching, and these dangerous attacks were constantly recurring, until the time of his death.

Sterne's sermons went through seven editions. They are not doctrinal, but enjoin benevolence and charity. There is not so much humour in them as in some of the present day, but he sometimes gives point to his reflections.

On the subject of religious fanaticism he says:—

"When a poor disconsolate drooping creature is terrified from all enjoyments—prays without ceasing till his imagination is heated—fasts and mortifies and mopes till his body is in as bad a plight as his mind, is it a wonder that the mechanical disturbances and conflicts of an empty belly, interpreted by an empty head, should be mistaken for the workings of a different kind to what they are? or that in such a situation every commotion should help to fix him in

this malady, and make him a fitter subject for the treatment of a physician than of a divine.

“The insolence of base minds in success is boundless—not unlike some little particles of matter struck off from the surface of the dial by the sunshine, they dance and sport there while it lasts, but the moment it is withdrawn they fall down—for dust they are, and unto dust they will return.

“When Absalom is cast down, Shimei is the first man who hastens to meet David; and had the wheel turned round a hundred times. Shimei, I dare say, at every period of its rotation, would have been uppermost. Oh, Shimei! would to heaven when thou wast slain, that all thy family had been slain with thee, and not one of thy resemblance left! but ye have multiplied exceedingly and replenished the earth; and if I prophecy rightly, ye will in the end subdue it.”

Dr. Johnson speaks of “the man Sterne,” and was jealous of his receiving so many more invitations than himself. But the good Doctor with all his learning and intellectual endowments was not so pleasant a companion as Sterne, and, although sometimes sarcastic, had none of his talent for humour.

Johnson wrote some pretty Anacreontics, but his turn of mind was rather grave than gay. He was generally pompous, which together with his self-sufficiency led Cowper, somewhat irreverently, to call him a “prig.” Among his few light and humorous snatches, we have lines written in ridicule of certain poems published in 1777—

“Wheresoe’er I turn my view,  
All is strange, yet nothing new;  
Endless labour all along,  
Endless labour to be wrong :

Phrase that time has flung away  
Uncouth words in disarray,  
Tricked in antique ruff and bonnet  
Ode, and elegy, and sonnet."

An imitation—

"Hermit poor in solemn cell  
Wearing out life's evening grey,  
Strike thy bosom sage and tell  
Which is bliss, and which the way.

"Thus I spoke, and speaking sighed  
Scarce repressed the starting tear  
When the hoary sage replied  
'Come my lad, and drink some beer.'"

The following is an impromptu conceit.  
"To Mrs. Thrale, on her completing her thirty-  
fifth year."

"Oft in danger, yet alive,  
We are come to thirty-five;  
Long may better years arrive  
Better years than thirty-five,  
Could philosophers contrive  
Life to stop at thirty-five,  
Time his hours should never drive  
O'er the bounds of thirty-five.  
High to soar, and deep to dive,  
Nature gives at thirty-five,  
Ladies stock and tend your hive,  
Trifle not at thirty-five,  
For howe'er we boast and strive  
Life declines from thirty-five.  
He that ever hopes to thrive  
Must begin by thirty-five,  
And all who wisely wish to wive  
Must look on Thrale at thirty-five."

There is a pleasing mixture of wisdom and  
humour in the following stanza written to  
Miss Thrale on hearing her consulting a friend  
as to a dress and hat she was inclined to wear—

"Wear the gown and wear the hat  
Snatch thy pleasures while they last,  
Had'st thou nine lives like a cat  
Soon those nine lives would be past."

Johnson's friends Garrick and Foote, although so great in the mimetic art, do not deserve any particular mention as writers of comedy.

It is said that Garrick went to a school in Tichfield at which Johnson was an usher, and that master and pupil came up to London together to seek their fortunes. But although Garrick became the first of comic actors, he produced nothing literary but a few indifferent farces. The same may be said of Foote, who was also a celebrated wit in conversation. Johnson said, "For loud, obstreperous, broad-faced mirth, I know not his equal."

One of Dr. Johnson's friends was Mrs. Charlotte Lennox to whom he gives the palm among literary ladies. Up to this time there were few lady humorists, and none of an altogether respectable description. But Mrs. Lennox appeared as a harbinger of that refined and harmless pleasantry which has since sparkled through the pages of our best authoresses. She wrote a comedy, poems, and novels, her most remarkable production being the *Female Quixote*. Here a young lady who had been reading romances, enacts the heroine with very amusing results. In plan the work is a close imitation of *Don Quixote*, but the character is not so natural as that drawn by Cervantes.



## CHAPTER VII.

Dodsley—"A Muse in Livery"—"The Devil's a Dunce"—  
 "The Toy Shop"—Fielding—Smollett.

**R**OBERT DODSLEY was born in 1703. He was the son of a schoolmaster in Mansfield, but went into domestic service as a footman, and held several respectable situations. While in this capacity, he employed his leisure time in composing poetry, and he appropriately named his first production "A Muse in Livery." The most pleasant and interesting of these early poems is that in which he gives an account of his daily life, showing how observant a footman may be. It is in the form of an epistle:—

"Dear friend,  
 Since I am now at leisure,  
 And in the country taking pleasure,  
 It may be worth your while to hear  
 A silly footman's business there;  
 I'll try to tell in easy rhyme  
 How I in London spent my time.  
 And first,  
 As soon as laziness would let me  
 I rise from bed, and down I sit me  
 To cleaning glasses, knives, and plate,  
 And such like dirty work as that,  
 Which (by the bye) is what I hate!  
 This done, with expeditious care

To dress myself I straight prepare,  
I clean my buckles, black my shoes,  
Powder my wig and brush my clothes,  
Take off my beard and wash my face,  
And then I'm ready for the chase.  
Down comes my lady's woman straight,  
'Where's Robin?' 'Here!' 'Pray take your hat  
And go—and go—and go—and go—  
And this and that desire to know.'  
The charge received, away run I  
And here and there, and yonder fly,  
With services and 'how d'ye does,'  
Then home return well fraught with news.  
Here some short time does interpose  
Till warm effluvias greet my nose,  
Which from the spits and kettles fly,  
Declaring dinner time is nigh.  
To lay the cloth I now prepare  
With uniformity and care;  
In order knives and forks are laid,  
With folded napkins, salt, and bread:  
The sideboards glittering too appear  
With plate and glass and china-ware.  
Then ale and beer and wine decanted,  
And all things ready which are wanted.  
The smoking dishes enter in,  
To stomachs sharp a grateful scene;  
Which on the table being placed,  
And some few ceremonies past,  
They all sit down and fall to eating,  
Whilst I behind stand silent waiting.  
This is the only pleasant hour  
Which I have in the twenty-four.  
For whilst I unregarded stand,  
With ready salver in my hand,  
And seem to understand no more  
Than just what's called for out to pour,  
I hear and mark the the courtly phrases,  
And all the elegance that passes;  
Disputes maintained without digression,  
With ready wit and fine expression;  
The laws of true politeness stated,  
And what good breeding is, debated.  
This happy hour elapsed and gone,  
The time for drinking tea comes on,  
The kettle filled, the water boiled,  
The cream provided, biscuits piled,

And lamp prepared, I straight engage  
The Lilliputian equipage,  
Of dishes, saucers, spoons and tongs,  
And all the et cetera which thereto belongs ;  
Which ranged in order and decorum  
I carry in and set before 'em,  
Then pour the green or bohea out,  
And as commanded hand about."

After the early dinner and "dish" of tea, his mistress goes out visiting in the evening, and Dodsley precedes her with a flambeau.

Another fancy was entitled "The Devil's a Dunce," was directed against the Pope.\* Two friends apply to him for absolution, one rich and the other poor. The rich man obtained the pardon, but the poor sued in vain, the Pope replying:—

"I cannot save you if I would,  
Nor would I do it if I could."

"Home goes the man in deep despair,  
And died soon after he came there,  
And went 'tis said to hell: but sure  
He was not there for being poor!  
But long he had not been below  
Before he saw his friend come too.  
At this he was in great surprise  
And scarcely could believe his eyes,  
'What! friend,' said he, 'are you come too?'"

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\* Dodsley was never averse from having a hit at the church, as in the epigram:

"Cries Sylvia to a reverend dean  
What reason can be given,  
Since marriage is a holy thing,  
That there are none in heaven?"

"'There are no women,' he replied,  
She quick returns the jest,  
'Women there are, but I'm afraid  
They cannot find a priest.'"

I thought the Pope had pardoned you.'  
'Yes,' quoth the man, 'I thought so too,  
But I was by the Pope trepanned,  
*The devil couldn't read his hand.'*"

The footman's next literary attempt was in a dramatic poem named "The Toy-Shop," and he had the courage to send it to Pope. Why he selected this poet does not plainly appear; by some it is said that his then mistress introduced her servant's poems to Pope's notice, but it is not improbable that Dodsley had heard of him from his brother, who was gardener to Mr. Allen of Prior Park, Bath, where Pope was often on a visit. However this may have been, he received a very kind letter from the poet, and an introduction to Mr. Rich, whose approval of the piece led to its being performed at Covent Garden.\* This play was the foundation of Dodsley's fortune. By means of the money thus obtained, he set himself up as a bookseller in Pall Mall, and became known to the world of rank and genius. He produced successively "The King and the Miller of Mansfield," and "The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green." He published for Pope, and in 1738, Samuel

\* There was a considerable amount of humour in it. Among the articles offered for sale in the toy-shop is, "the least box that ever was seen in England," in which nevertheless, "a courtier may deposit his sincerity, a lawyer may screw up his honesty, and a poet may hoard up his money."

Johnson sold his first original publication to him for ten guineas. He suggested to Dr. Johnson the scheme of writing an English Dictionary, and also, in conjunction with Edmund Burke, commenced the "Annual Register." Dodsley's principal work was the "Economy of Human Life," written in an aphoristic style, and ascribed to Lord Chesterfield. He also made a collection of six volumes of contemporary poems, and they show how much rarer humour was than sentiment, for Dodsley was not a man to omit anything sparkling. The following imitation of Ambrose Philips—a general butt—has merit :

A PIPE OF TOBACCO.

Little tube of mighty power,  
Charmer of an idle hour,  
Object of my warm desire  
Lip of wax, and eye of fire,  
And thy snowy taper waist  
With my finger gently braced,  
And thy pretty smiling crest  
With my little stopper pressed,  
And the sweetest bliss of blisses  
Breathing from thy balmy kisses,  
Happy thrice and thrice again  
Happiest he of happy men,  
Who, when again the night returns,  
When again the taper burns,  
When again the cricket's gay,  
(Little cricket full of play),  
Can afford his tube to feed  
With the fragrant Indian weed.  
Pleasures for a nose divine  
Incense of the god of wine,  
Happy thrice and thrice again,  
Happiest he of happy men."

Few humorous writers have attained to a greater celebrity than Fielding. He was born in 1707, was a son of General Fielding, and a relative of Lord Denbigh. In his early life, his works, which were comedies, were remarkable for severe satire, and some of them so political as to be instrumental in leading to the Chamberlain's supervision of the stage. His turn of mind was decidedly cynical.

In the "Pleasures of the Town," we have many songs, of which the following is a specimen:—

"The stone that always turns at will  
To gold, the chemist craves;  
But gold, without the chemist's skill,  
Turns all men into knaves.

"The merchant would the courtier cheat,  
When on his goods he lays  
Too high a price—but faith he's bit—  
For a courtier never pays.

"The lawyer with a face demure,  
Hangs him who steals your pelf,  
Because the good man can endure  
No robber but himself.

"Betwixt the quack and highwayman,  
What difference can there be?  
Tho' this with pistol, that with pen,  
Both kill you for a fee."

His plays were not very successful. They abounded in witty sallies and repartee, but the general plot was not humorous. The jollity was of a rough farcical character. It was said he left off writing for the stage

when he should have begun. He took little care with his plays, and would go home late from a tavern, and bring a dramatic scene in the morning, written on the paper in which he had wrapped his tobacco.

In many of his works he shows a mind approaching that of the Roman satirists. Speaking of "Jonathan Wild," he says:—

"I think we may be excused for suspecting that the splendid palaces of the great are often no other than Newgate with the mask on; nor do I know anything which can raise an honest man's indignation higher than that the same morals should be in one place attended with all imaginary misery and infamy, and in the other with the highest luxury and honour. Let any impartial man in his senses be asked, for which of these two places a composition of cruelty, lust, avarice, rapine, insolence, hypocrisy, fraud, and treachery is best fitted? Surely his answer will be certain and immediate; and yet I am afraid all these ingredients glossed over with wealth and a title have been treated with the highest respect and veneration in the one, while one or two of them have been condemned to the gallows in the other. If there are, then, any men of such morals, who dare call themselves great, and are so reputed, or called at least, by the deceived multitude, surely a little private censure by the few is a very moderate tax for them to pay."

There is a considerable amount of humour in Fielding's "Journey from this World to the Next." He represents the spirits as drawing lots before they enter this life as to what their destinies are to be, and he introduces a sort of migration of souls, in which Julian becomes a king, fool, tailor, beggar, &c. As a tailor, he speaks of the dignity of his calling, "the

prince gives the title, but the tailor makes the man." Of course his reflections turn very much upon his bills,

"Courtiers," he says, "may be divided into two sorts, very essentially different from each other; into those who never intend to pay for their clothes, and those who do intend to pay for them, but are never able. Of the latter sort are many of those young gentlemen whom we equip out for the army, and who are, unhappily for us, cast off before they arrive at preferment. This is the reason why tailors in time of war are mistaken for politicians by their inquisitiveness into the event of battles, one campaign very often proving the ruin of half-a-dozen of us."

Julian also gives his experience during his life as a beggar, showing that his life was not so very miserable.

"I married a charming young woman for love; she was the daughter of a neighbouring beggar, who with an improvidence too often seen, spent a very large income, which he procured from his profession, so that he was able to give her no fortune down. However, at his death he left her a very well-accustomed begging hut situated on the side of a steep hill, where travellers could not immediately escape from us; and a garden adjoining, being the twenty-eighth part of an acre well-planted. She made the best of wives, bore me nineteen children, and never failed to get my supper ready against my return home—this being my favourite meal, and at which I, as well as my whole family, greatly enjoyed ourselves."

"No profession," he observes, "requires a deeper insight into human nature than a beggar's. Their knowledge of the passions of men is so extensive, that I have often thought it would be of no little service to a politician to have his education among them. Nay, there is a much greater analogy between these two characters than is imagined: for both concur in their first and grand principle, it being equally their business to delude and impose on mankind. It must be admitted that they differ widely in the degree of advantage, which they make of their deceit; for whereas the beggar is contented with a little, the politician leaves but a little behind."

There is a considerable amount of indelicacy



in the episodes in "Tom Jones," and also of hostility, which is exhibited in the rough form of pugilistic encounters, so as almost to remind us of the old comic stage. He seems especially fond of settling quarrels in this way, and wishes that no other was ever used, and that "iron should dig no bowels but those of the earth." The character of Deborah Wilkins, the old maid who is shocked at the frivolity of Jenny Jones; of Thwackum, the schoolmaster, whose "meditations were full of birch;" and of the barber, whose jests, although they brought him so many slaps and kicks "would come," are excellent. There is a vast fertility of humour in his pages, which depending upon the general circumstances and peculiar characters of the persons introduced, cannot be easily appreciated in extracts. The following, however, can be understood easily:—

"'I thought there must be a devil,' the sergeant says to the innkeeper, 'notwithstanding what the officers said, though one of them was a captain, for methought, thinks I to myself, if there be no devil how can wicked people be sent to him? and I have read all that upon a book.' 'Some of your officers,' quoth the landlord, 'will find there is a devil to their shame, I believe. I don't question but he'll pay off some old scores upon my account. Here was one quartered upon me half-a-year, who had the conscience to take up one of my best beds, though he hardly spent a shilling a day in the house, and his man went to roast cabbages at the kitchen fire, because I would not give them a dinner on Sunday. Every good Christian must desire that there should be a devil for the punishment of such wretches. . . .'"

The Man of the Hill gives his travelling experiences :—

“In Italy the landlords are very silent. In France they are more talkative, but yet civil. In Germany and Holland they are generally very impertinent. And as for their honesty I believe it is pretty equal in all those countries. . . . As for my own part, I past through all these nations, as you perhaps may have through a crowd at a show, jostling to get by them, holding my nose with one hand, and defending my pockets with the other, without speaking a word to any of them while I was pressing on to see what I wanted to see.’

“Did you not find some of the nations less troublesome to you than the others ?” said Jones.

“Oh, yes,” replied the old man, ‘the Turks were much more tolerable to me than the Christians, for they are men of profound taciturnity, and never disturb a stranger with questions. Now and then, indeed, they bestow a short curse upon him, or spit in his face as he walks in the streets, but then they have done with him.’”

From another passage, we find that ladies are armed with very deadly weapons. He had said that Love was no more capable of allaying hunger than a rose is capable of delighting the ear, or a violin of gratifying the smell, and he gives an instance :—

“Say then, ye graces, you that inhabit the heavenly mansions of Seraphina’s countenance, what were the weapons used to captivate the heart of Mr. Jones, First, from two lovely blue eyes, whose bright orbs flashed lightning at their discharge, flew off two pointed ogles ; but, happily for our hero, hit only a vast piece of beef, which he was then conveying into his plate. The fair warrior perceived their miscarriage, and immediately from her fair bosom drew forth a deadly sigh ; a sigh, which none could have heard unmoved, and which was sufficient at once to have swept off a dozen beaux—so soft, so sweet, so tender, that the insinuating air must have found its subtle way to the heart of our hero, had it not luckily been driven from his ears by the coarse bubbling of some bottled ale which at that time he was pouring forth. Many other weapons

did she essay; but the god of eating (if there be any such deity) preserved his votary; or, perhaps, the security of Jones may be accounted for by natural means, for, as love frequently preserves from the attacks of hunger, so may hunger possibly, in some cases, defend us against love. No sooner was the cloth removed, than she again began her operations. First, having planted her right eye sideways against Mr. Jones, she shot from its corner a most penetrating glance, which, though great part of its force was spent before it reached our hero, did not vent itself without effect. This, the fair one perceiving, hastily withdrew her eyes, and levelled them downwards as if she was concerned only for what she had done, though by this means she designed only to draw him from his guard, and indeed to open his eyes, through which she intended to surprise his heart. And now gently lifting those two bright orbs, which had already begun to make an impression on poor Jones, she discharged a volley of small charms from her whole countenance in a smile. Not a smile of mirth or of joy, but a smile of affection, which most ladies have always ready at their command, and which serves them to show at once their good-humour, their pretty dimples, and their white teeth.

This smile our hero received full in his eyes, and was immediately staggered with its force. He then began to see the designs of the enemy, and indeed to feel their success. A parley now was set on foot between the parties, during which the artful fair so slyly and imperceptibly carried on her attack, that she had almost subdued the heart of our hero before she again repaired to acts of hostility. To confess the truth, I am afraid Mr. Jones maintained a kind of Dutch defence, and treacherously delivered up the garrison without duly weighing his allegiance to the fair Sophia."

It has generally been the custom to couple the name of Smollett with that of Fielding, but the former has scarcely any claim to be regarded as a humorist, except such as is largely due to the use of gross indelicacy and coarse caricature. He first attempted poetry, and wrote two dull satires "Advice" and "Reproof." His "Ode to Mirth," is somewhat sprightly, but of his

songs the following is a favourable specimen :—

“ From the man whom I love, though my heart I disguise,  
I will freely describe the wretch I despise,  
And if he has sense but to balance a straw  
He will sure take the hint from the picture I draw.

“ A wit without sense, without fancy, a beau,  
Like a parrot he chatters, and struts like a crow;  
A peacock in pride, in grimace a baboon,  
In courage a hind, in conceit a gascon.

“ As a vulture rapacious, in falsehood a fox,  
Inconstant as waves, and unfeeling as rocks,  
As a tiger ferocious, perverse as a hog  
In mischief an ape, and in fawning a dog.

“ In a word, to sum up all his talents together,  
His heart is of lead, and his brain is of feather,  
Yet if he has sense to balance a straw  
He will sure take the hint from the picture I draw.”

Although Smollett indulged in great coarseness, I doubt whether he has anything more humorous in his writings than the above lines. Sir Walter Scott formed a more just opinion of him than some later critics. He says:—

“ Smollett's humour arises from the situation of the persons, or the peculiarity of their external appearance, as Roderick Random's carrotty locks, which hung down over his shoulders like a pound of candles; or Strap's ignorance of London, and the blunders that follow it. There is a tone of vulgarity about all his productions.”

Smollett was born in Dumbartonshire in 1721. He became a surgeon, and for six or seven years was employed in the Navy in that capacity. This may account for the strong flavour of brine and tar in the best of his works—his sea sketches have a considerable amount of

character in them—sometimes rather too much. His liberal use of nautical language is exhibited when Lieutenant Hatchway is going away,

“Trunnion, not a little affected, turned his eye ruefully upon the lieutenant saying in piteous tone, ‘What! leave me at last, Jack, after we have weathered so many hard gales together? Damn my limbs! I thought you had been more of an honest heart: I looked upon you as my foremast and Tom Pipes as my mizen; now he is carried away; if so be as you go too, my standing rigging being decayed d’ye see, the first squall will bring me by the board. Damn ye, if in case I have given offence, can’t you speak above board, and I shall make you amends.”

Some idea of his best comic scenes, which have a certain kind of humorous merit, may be obtained from the following description of the progress of Commodore Trunnion and his party to the Wedding. Wishing to go in state, they advance on horseback, and are seen crossing the road obliquely so as to avoid the eye of the wind. The cries of a pack of hounds unfortunately reach the horses’ ears, who being hunters, immediately start off after them in full gallop.

“The Lieutenant, whose steed had got the heels of the others, finding it would be great folly and presumption in him to pretend to keep the saddle with his wooden leg, very wisely took the opportunity of throwing himself off in his passage through a field of rich clover, among which he lay at his ease; and seeing his captain advancing at full gallop, hailed him with the salutation of ‘What cheer? ho!’ The Commodore, who was in infinite distress, eyeing him askance, as he passed replied with a faltering voice, ‘O damn ye! you are safe at an anchor, I wish to God I were as fast moored.’ Nevertheless, conscious of his disabled heel, he would not venture to try the experiment that had succeeded so well with Hatchway, but resolved to stick as

close as possible to his horse's back, until Providence should interpose in his behalf. With this view he dropped his whip, and with his right hand laid fast hold of the pommel, contracting every muscle of his body to secure himself in the seat, and grinning most formidably in consequence of this exertion. In this attitude he was hurried on a considerable way, when all of a sudden his view was comforted by a five-bar gate that appeared before him, as he never doubted that there the career of his hunter must necessarily end. But alas! he reckoned without his host. Far from halting at this obstruction, the horse sprang over with amazing agility, to the utter confusion and disorder of his owner, who lost his hat and periwig in the leap, and now began to think in good earnest that he was actually mounted on the back of the devil. He recommended himself to God, his reflection forsook him, his eyesight and all his other senses failed, he quitted the reins, and fastening by instinct on the main, was in this condition conveyed into the midst of the sportsmen, who were astonished at the sight of such an apparition. Neither was their surprise to be wondered at, if we reflect on the figure that presented itself to their view."

Smollett delights in practical jokes, fighting, and violent language. Sometimes we are almost in danger of the dagger. He rejoices in fun, in such scenes as that of Random fighting Captain Weasel with the roasting-spit, and what he says in "Humphrey Clinker" of the ladies, at a party in Bath, might better apply to his own dialogues. "Some cried, some swore, and the tropes and figures of Billingsgate were used without reserve in all their native rest and flavour."

## CHAPTER VIII.

Cowper—Lady Austen's Influence—"John Gilpin"—"The Task"—Goldsmith—"The Citizen of the World"—Humorous Poems—Quacks—Baron Münchhausen.

HUMOUR seems to have an especial claim upon us in connection with the name of Cowper, inasmuch as but for it we should never have become acquainted with his writings. Many as are the charms of his works, they would never have become popularly known without this addition. In 1782 he published his collection of poems, but it only had an indifferent sale. Although friends spoke well of them, reviews gave forth various and uncertain opinions, and there was no sufficient inducement to lead the public to buy or read. Cowper was upon the verge of sinking into the abyss of unsuccessful authors, when a bright vision crossed his path. Lady Austin paid a visit to Olney. She had lived much in France, and was overflowing with good humour and vivacity. She came to reside at the Vicarage at the back of his house, and they

became so intimate that they passed the days alternately with each other. "Lady Austin's conversation had," writes Southey, "as happy an effect on the melancholy spirit of Cowper, as the harp of David had upon Saul."

It is refreshing to turn from cynicism and prurience, to gentle and more harmless pleasantry. Cowper was very sympathetic, and easily took the impression of those with whom he consorted. Most of his pieces were written at the suggestion of others. Mrs. Unwin was of a melancholy and serious turn of mind, and tended to repress his lighter fancies, but his letters show that playfulness was natural to him; and in his first volume of poems we find two pieces of a decidedly humorous cast. We have "The Report of an Adjudged Case not to be found in any of the books."

"Between nose and eyes a strange contest arose,  
The spectacles set them unhappily wrong,  
The point in dispute was, as all the world knows,  
To which the said spectacles ought to belong."

We know the Chief Baron Ear, finally gave his decision—

"That whenever the nose put his spectacles on  
By daylight or candlelight, eyes should be shut."

The other piece is called "Hypocrisy Detected."

"Thus says the prophet of the Turk,  
Good Mussulman, abstain from pork,  
There is a part in every swine  
No friend or follower of mine



May taste, whate'er his inclination  
On pain of excommunication.  
Such Mahomet's mysterious charge,  
And thus he left the point at large.  
Had he the sinful part expressed  
They might with safety eat the rest ;  
But for one piece they thought it hard  
From the whole hog to be debarred,  
And set their wit at work to find  
What joint the prophet had in mind.  
Much controversy straight arose  
These choose the back, the belly those ;  
By some 'tis confidently said  
He meant not to forbid the head ;  
While others at that doctrine rail,  
And piously prefer the tail.  
Thus conscience freed from every clog,  
Mahometans eat up the hog."

The moral follows, pointing out that each one makes an exception in favour of his own besetting sin.

These touches of humour which had hitherto appeared timidly in his writings were encouraged by Lady Austen. "A new scene is opening," he writes, "which will add fresh plumes to the wings of time." She was his bright and better genius. Trying in every way to cheer his spirits, she told him one day an old nursery story she had heard in her childhood—the "History of John Gilpin." Cowper was much taken with it, and next morning he came down to breakfast with a ballad composed upon it, which made them laugh till they cried. He sent it to Mr. Unwin, who had it inserted in a newspaper. But little was thought of it, until Henderson, a

well-known actor introduced it into his readings.\* From that moment Cowper's fame was secured, and his next work "The Task," also suggested by Lady Austen, had a wide circulation.

After this success, Lady Austen set Cowper a "Task," which he performed excellently and secured his fame. He was at first at a loss how to begin it—"Write on anything," she said, "on this sofa." He took her at her word, and proceeded - -

"The nurse sleeps sweetly, hired to watch the sick,  
Whom snoring she disturbs. As sweetly he  
Who quits the coachbox at the midnight hour  
To sleep within the carriage more secure,  
His legs depending at the open door.  
Sweet sleep enjoys the curate in his desk,  
The tedious rector drawling o'er his head,  
And sweet the clerk below : but neither sleep  
Of lazy nurse, who snores the sick man dead,  
Nor his, who quits the box at midnight hour  
To slumber in the carriage more secure,  
Nor sleep enjoyed by curate in his desk,  
Nor yet the dozings of the clerk are sweet  
Compared with the repose the sofa yields."

Cowper lived in the country, and wrote many poems on birds and flowers. In his first volume there are "The Doves," "The Raven's

\* This introduction to popularity reminds us of the poet Lover, who would never have been so well known had not Madame Vestris, when in want of a comic song, selected "Rory O'More," which afterwards became so famous. The celebrated enigma on the letter H was also produced by a suggestion accidentally made overnight, and developed before morning by Miss Fanshawe into beautiful lines formerly ascribed to Byron.

Nest," "The Lily and the Rose," "The Nightingale and the Glowworm," "The Pine-Apple and the Bee," "The Goldfinch starved to death in a Cage," and some others. They are pretty conceits, but at the present day remind us a little of the nursery.

Goldsmith's humour deserves equal praise for affording amusement without animosity or indelicacy. With regard to the former, his satire is so general that it cannot inflict any wound; and although he may have slightly erred in one or two passages on the latter score, he condemns all such seasoning of humour, which is used, as he says, to compensate for want of invention. In his plays, there is much good broad-humoured fun without anything offensive. Simple devices such as Tony Lumpkin's causing a manor-house to be mistaken for an inn, produces much harmless amusement. It is noteworthy that the first successful work of Goldsmith was his "Citizen of the World." Here the correspondence of a Chinaman in England with one of his friends in his own country, affords great scope for humour, the manners and customs of each nation being regarded according to the views of the other. The intention is to show absurdities on the same plan which led afterwards to the popularity of "Hadji Baba in England." Sometimes the

faults pointed out seem real, sometimes the criticism is meant to be oriental and ridiculous. Thus going to an English theatre he observes—

“The richest, in general, were placed in the lowest seats, and the poor rose above them in degrees proportionate to their poverty. The order of precedence seemed here inverted; those who were undermost all the day, enjoyed a temporary eminence and became masters of the ceremonies. It was they who called for the music, indulging every noisy freedom, and testifying all the insolence of beggary in exaltation.”

Real censure is intended in the following, which shows the change in ladies dress within the last few years—

“What chiefly distinguishes the sex at present is the train. As a lady’s quality or fashion was once determined here by the circumference of her hoop, both are now measured by the length of her tail. Women of moderate fortunes are contented with tails moderately long, but ladies of tone, taste, and distinction set no bounds to their ambition in this particular. I am told the Lady Mayoress on days of ceremony carries one longer than a bell-wether of Bantam, whose tail, you know, is trundled along in a wheelbarrow.”

A “little beau” discoursing with the Chinaman, observes—

“I am told your Asiatic beauties are the most convenient women alive, for they have no souls; positively there is nothing in nature I should like so much as women without souls; soul here is the utter ruin of half the sex. A girl of eighteen shall have soul enough to spend a hundred pounds in the turning of a trump. Her mother shall have soul enough to ride a sweepstake snatch at a horse-race; her maiden aunt shall have soul enough to purchase the furniture of a whole toy-shop, and others shall have soul enough to behave as if they had no souls at all.”

The “Citizen of the World” cannot under-

stand why there are so many old maids and bachelors in England. He regards the latter as most contemptible, and says the mob should be permitted to halloo after them; boys might play tricks on them with impunity; every well-bred company should laugh at them, and if one of them, when turned sixty, offered to make love, his mistress might spit in his face, or what would be a greater punishment should fairly accept him. Old maids he would not treat with such severity, because he supposes they are not so by their own fault; but he hears that many have received offers, and refused them. Miss Squeeze, the pawnbroker's daughter, had heard so much about money, that she resolved never to marry a man whose fortune was not equal to her own, without ever considering that some abatement should be made as her face was pale and marked with the small-pox. Sophronia loved Greek, and hated men. She rejected fine gentlemen because they were not pedants, and pedants because they were not fine gentlemen. She found a fault in every lover, until the wrinkles of old age overtook her, and now she talks incessantly of the beauties of the mind.

The character of the information contained in the daily newspapers is thus described—

"The universal passion for politics is gratified with daily papers, as with us in China. But, as in ours, the Emperor endeavours to instruct his people; in theirs the people endeavour to instruct the Administration. You must not, however, imagine that they who compile these papers have any actual knowledge of politics or the government of a state; they only collect their materials from the oracle of some coffee-house, which oracle has himself gathered them the night before from a beau at a gaming-table, who has pillaged his knowledge from the great man's porter, who has had his information from the great man's gentleman, who has invented the whole story for his own amusement the night preceding."

He gives the following specimens of contradictory newspaper intelligence from abroad.

"*Vienna*.—We have received certain advices that a party of twenty-thousand Austrians, having attacked a much superior body of Prussians, put them all to flight, and took the rest prisoners of war.

"*Berlin*.—We have received certain advices that a party of twenty-thousand Prussians, having attacked a much superior body of Austrians, put them to flight, and took a great number of prisoners with their military chest, cannon, and baggage."

The Chinaman observing the laudatory character of epitaphs, suggests a plan by which flattery might be indulged, without sacrificing truth. The device is that anciently called "contrary to expectation," but apparently borrowed by Goldsmith from some French poem. Here is a specimen.

"Ye Muses, pour the pitying tear,  
For Pollio snatched away;  
O, had he lived another year  
He had not died to-day." . . .

He gives another on Madam Blaize—

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“ Good people all with one accord  
Lament for Madam Blaize,  
Who never wanted a good word  
From those who spoke her praise.”

The Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog terminates in a stroke taken from the old epigram of Demodocus—

“ Good people all, of every sort,  
Give ear unto my song,  
And if you find it wondrous short,  
It cannot hold you long.

“ In Islington there was a man,  
Of whom the world might say,  
That still a godly race he ran,  
Whene’er he went to pray.

“ A kind and gentle heart he had,  
To comfort friends and foes,  
The naked every day he clad,  
When he put on his clothes.

“ And in this town a dog was found,  
As many dogs there be,  
Both mongrel, puppy, whelps, and hound,  
And curs of low degree.

“ This dog and man at first were friends,  
But when a pique began,  
The dog to gain some private ends,  
Went mad, and bit the man.

“ Around from all the neighbouring streets  
The wondering neighbours ran,  
And swore the dog had lost his wits,  
To bite so good a man.

“ The wound, it seemed both sore and sad  
To every Christian eye;  
And, while they swore the dog was mad,  
They swore the man would die.

“ But soon a wonder came to light  
That showed the rogues they lied,  
The man recovered of the bite,  
The dog it was that died.”

The fine and elegant humour in “The

Vicar of Wakefield" and "The Deserted Village," has greatly contributed to give those works a lasting place in the literature of this country. Goldsmith attacked, among other imposters, the quacks of his day, who promised to cure every disease. Reading their advertisements, he is astonished that the English patient should be so obstinate as to refuse health on such easy terms. We find from Swift that astrologers and fortune-tellers were very plentiful in these times. The following lament was written towards the end of the last century upon the death of one of them—Dr. Safford, a quack and fortune-teller.

"Lament, ye damsels of our London City,  
Poor unprovided girls, though fair and witty,  
Who masked would to his house in couples come,  
To understand your matrimonial doom;  
To know what kind of man you were to marry,  
And how long time, poor things, you were to tarry;  
Your oracle is silent; none can tell  
On whom his astrologic mantle fell;  
For he, when sick, refused the doctor's aid,  
And only to his pills devotion paid,  
Yet it was surely a most sad disaster,  
The saucy pills at last should kill their master."

The travels of Baron Münchausen were first published in 1786, and the esteem in which they were held, and we may conclude their merit, was shown by the numbers of editions rapidly succeeding each other, and by the translations which were made into foreign languages. It is somewhat strange that there should be a



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doubt with regard to the authorship of so popular a work, but it is generally attributed to one Raspi, a German who fled from the officers of justice to England. As, however, there is little originality in the stories, we feel the less concerned at being unable satisfactorily to trace their authorship—they were probably a collection of the tales with which some old German baron was wont to amuse his guests. A satire was evidently intended upon the marvellous tales in which travellers and sportsmen indulged, and the first edition is humbly dedicated to Mr. Bruce, whose accounts of Abyssinia were then generally discredited. With the exception of this attack upon travellers' tales there is nothing severe in the work—there is no indelicacy or profanity—considerable falsity was, of course, necessary, otherwise the accounts would have been merely fanciful. We have nothing here to mar our amusement, except infinite extravagance. The author does not claim much originality, and he admits an imitation of *Gulliver's Travels*. But, no doubt, something is due to his insight in selection, and to his ingenuity in telling the stories well and circumstantially; otherwise this book would never have become historical, when so many similar productions have perished. The stories in the first six chapters, which

formed the original book, are superior to those in the continuation; there is always something specious, some ground-work for the gross improbabilities, which gives force to them. Thus, for instance, travelling in Poland over the deep snow he fastens his horse to something he takes to be a post, and which turns out to be the top of a steeple. By the morning the snow has disappeared—he sees his mistake, and his horse is hanging on the top of the church by its bridle. When on his road to St. Petersburg, a wolf made after him and overtook him. Escape was impossible.

“I laid myself down flat in the sledge, and let my horse run for safety. The wolf did not mind me, but took a leap over me, and falling on the horse began to tear and devour the hinder part of the poor animal, which ran all the faster for its pain and terror. I lifted up my head sily, and beheld with horror that the wolf had ate his way into the horse’s body. It was not long before he had fairly forced himself into it, when I took my advantage and fell upon him with the end of my whip. This unexpected attack frightened him so much that he leaped forward, the horse’s carcase dropped to the ground, but in his place the wolf was in harness, and I on my part whipping him continually, arrived in full career at St. Petersburg much to the astonishment of the spectators.”

“Speaking of stags, he mentions St. Hubert’s stag, which appeared with a cross between its horns. “They always have been,” he observes, “and still are famous for plantations and antlers.” This furnishes him with the ground-work of his story.

“Having one day spent all my shot, I found myself un-

expectedly in presence of a stately stag looking at me as unconcernedly as if it had really known of my empty pouches. I charged immediately with powder and upon it a good handful of cherry stones. Thus I let fly and hit him just in the middle of the forehead between the antlers; he staggered, but made off. A year or two afterwards, being with a party in the same forest, I beheld a noble stag with a fine full-grown cherry tree above ten feet high between its antlers. I brought him down at one shot, and he gave me haunch and cherry sauce, for the tree was covered with fruit."

In his ride across to Holland from Harwich under the sea, he finds great mountains "and upon their sides a variety of tall noble trees loaded with marine fruit, such as lobsters, crabs, oysters, scollops, mussels, cockles, &c.," the periwinkle, he observes, is a kind of shrub, it grows at the foot of the oyster tree, and twines round it as the ivy does round the oak.

In the following, we have a manifest imitation of Lucian—Having passed down Mount Etna through the earth, and come out at the other side, he finds himself in the Southern Seas, and soon comes to land. They sail up a river flowing with rich milk, and find that they are in an island consisting of one large cheese—

"We discovered this by one of the company fainting away as soon as he landed; this man always had an aversion to cheese—when he recovered he desired the cheese to be taken from under his feet. Upon examination we found him to be perfectly right—the whole island was nothing but a cheese of immense magnitude. Here were plenty of vines with bunches of grapes, which yielded nothing but milk."

In all these cases he has contrived where there

was an opening to introduce some probable details. But as he proceeds further in his work, his talent becoming duller—his extravagancies are worse sustained and scarcely ever original. Sometimes he writes mere mawkish nonsense, and at others he simply copies Lucian, as in the case of his making a voyage to the moon, and then sailing into a sea-monster's stomach.

## CHAPTER IX.

The Anti-Jacobin—Its Objects and Violence—"The Friends of Freedom"—Imitation of Latin Lyrics—The "Knife Grinder"—The "Progress of Man."

THE "Anti-Jacobin" was commenced in 1797, with a view of counteracting the baneful influences of those revolutionary principles which were already rampant in France. The periodical, supported by the combined talent of such men as Gifford, Ellis, Hookham Frere, Jenkinson (Lord Liverpool) Lord Clare, Dr. Whitaker, and Lord Mornington, would no doubt have had a long and successful career, had not politics led it into a vituperative channel, through which it came to an untimely end in eight months. The following address to Jacobinism will give some idea of its spirit :—

" Daughter of Hell, insatiate power,  
 Destroyer of the human race,  
 Whose iron scourge and maddening hour  
 Exalt the bad, the good debase :  
 Thy mystic force, despotic sway,  
 Courage and innocence dismay,  
 And patriot monarchs vainly groan  
 With pangs unfelt before, unpitied and alone."

There were pictorial illustrations consisting of political caricatures of a very gross character, representing men grotesquely deformed, and sometimes intermixed with monsters, demons, frogs, toads, and other animlas.

One part of the paper was headed "Lies," and another was devoted to correcting less culpable mis-statements. Some prose satirical pieces were introduced, such as "Fox's Birthday," in which a mock description of a grand dinner is given, at which all the company had their pockets picked. After the delivery of revolutionary orations, and some attempts at singing "Paddy Whack," and "All the books of Moses," the festival terminates in a disgusting scene of uproar. Several similar reports are given of "The Meeting of the Friends of Freedom," upon which occasions absurd speeches are made, such as that by Mr. Macfurgus, who declaims in the following grandiloquent style:—

"Before the Temple of Freedom can be erected the surface must be smoothed and levelled, it must be cleared by repeated revolutionary explosions, from all the lumber and rubbish with which aristocracy and fanaticism will endeavour to encumber it, and to impede the progress of the holy work. The completion of the edifice will indeed be the more tardy, but it will not be the less durable for having been longer delayed. Cemented with the blood of tyrants and the tears of the aristocracy, it will rise a monument for the astonishment and veneration of future ages. The remotest posterity with our children yet unborn, and the most distant portions of the globe will crowd round its gates, and demand admission into its sanctuary. 'The Tree of Liberty' will be planted in the midst, and its branches will extend to the ends of the earth, while the

friends of freedom meet and fraternize and amalgamate under its consolatory shade. There our infants shall be taught to lisp in tender accents the revolutionary hymn, there with wreaths of myrtle, and oak, and poplar, and vine, and olive and cypress, and ivy, with violets and roses and daffodils and dandelions in our hands, we will swear respect to childhood and manhood, and old age, and virginity, and womanhood, and widowhood; but above all to the Supreme Being. There we will decree and sanction the immortality of the soul, there pillars and obelisks, and arches, and pyramids will awaken the love of glory and of our country. There painters and statuaries with their chisels and colours, and engravers with their engraving tools will perpetuate the interesting features of our revolutionary heroes."

The next extract is called "The Army of England," written by the ci-devant Bishop of Autun, and represents a French invasion as imminent:—

" Good republicans all  
The Directory's call  
Invites you to visit John Bull;  
Oppressed by the rod  
Of a king and a God  
The cup of his misery's full;

" Old Johnny shall see  
What makes a man free,  
Not parchments, or statutes, or paper;  
And stripped of his riches,  
Great charter and breeches,  
Shall cut a free citizen's caper.

" Then away, let us over  
To Deal or to Dover,  
We laugh at his talking so big;  
He's pampered with feeding,  
And wants a sound bleeding,  
*Par Dieu!* he shall bleed like a pig.

" John tied to a stake  
A grand baiting will make  
When worried by mastiffs of France,  
What republican fun  
To see his blood run  
As at Lyons, La Vendée and Nantes.

“ With grape-shot discharges,  
 And plugs in his barges,  
 With national razors good store,  
 We'll pepper and shave him  
 And in the Thames lave him—  
 How sweetly he'll bellow and roar!

“ What the villain likes worse  
 We'll vomit his purse  
 And make it the guineas disgorge,  
 For your Raphaels and Rubens  
 We would not give twopence;  
 Stick, stick to the pictures of George.”

The following is on “The New Coalition”  
 between Fox and Horne Tooke.

*Fox.* When erst I coalesced with North  
 And brought my Indian bantling forth  
 In place—I smiled at faction's storm,  
 Nor dreamt of radical reform.

*Tooke.* While yet no patriot project pushing  
 Content I thumped old Brentford's cushion,  
 I passed my life so free and gaily,  
 Not dreaming of that d—d Old Bailey.

*Fox.* Well, now my favourite preacher's Nickle,  
 He keeps for Pitt a rod in pickle;  
 His gestures fright the astonished gazers,  
 His sarcasms cut like Packwood's razors.

*Tooke.* Thelwall's my name for state alarm;  
 I love the rebels of Chalk Farm;  
 Rogues that no statutes can subdue,  
 Who'd bring the French, and head them too.

*Fox.* A whisper in your ear John Horne,  
 For one great end we both were born,  
 Alike we roar, and rant and bellow—  
 Give us your hand my honest fellow.

*Tooke.* Charles, for a shuffler long I've known thee,  
 But come—for once I'll not disown thee,  
 And since with patriot zeal thou burnest,  
 With thee I'll live—or hang in earnest.

But the most celebrated of these poems is



"The Friend of Humanity, and The Knife-Grinder"—

*Friend of Humanity.* Needy knife-grinder! whither are you going?

Rough is the road, your wheel is out of order,  
Bleak blows the blast; your hat has got a hole in't,  
So have your breeches!

Weary knife-grinder! little think the proud ones,  
Who in their coaches roll along the turnpike-road,  
What hard work 'tis crying all day, "knives and  
Scissors to grind, O!"

Tell me, knife-grinder, how you came to grind knives?

Did some rich man tyrannically use you?

Was it the squire? or parson of the parish?

Or the attorney?

Was it the squire for killing of his game? or

Covetous parson for his tithes distraining?

Or roguish lawyer, made you lose your little

All in a lawsuit?

(Have you not read the "Rights of Man" by Tom Paine?)

Drops of compassion tremble on my eyelids,

Ready to fall as soon as you have told your

Pitiful story.

*Knife-grinder.* Story! God bless you! I have none to tell, Sir;

Only last night a-drinking at the 'Chequers,'

This poor old hat and breeches, as you see, were

Torn in a scuffle.

Constables came up for to take me into

Custody; they took me before the justice,

Justice Oldmixon put me in the parish-

Stocks for a vagrant.

I should be glad to drink your honour's health in

A pot of beer, if you will give me sixpence,

But for my part I never love to meddle

With politics, Sir.

*Friend of Humanity.* I give thee sixpence! I will see thee d——d first!

Wretch! whom no sense of wrong can rouse to vengeance!

Sordid! unfeeling! reprobate! degraded!

Spiritless outcast!

(Kicks the knife-grinder, overturns his wheel, and exit in a transport of Republican enthusiasm and universal philanthropy.)

This poem, written as a parody of "The

Widow " of Southey, is said to have annihilated English Sapphics. Various attempts were formerly made to adapt classic metres to English ; not only Gabriel Harvey but Sir Philip Sydney tried to bring in hexameters. Beattie says the attempt was ridiculous, but since Longfellow's "Evangeline " we look upon them with more favour, though they are not popular. Dr. Watts wrote a Sapphic ode on the "Last Judgment," which notwithstanding the solemnity of the subject, almost provokes a smile.

Frere was a man of great taste and humour. He wrote many amusing poems. Among his contributions, jointly with Canning and Ellis, to the "Anti-Jacobin," is the "Loves of the Triangles," and the scheme of a play called the "Double Arrangement," a satire upon the immorality of the German plays then in vogue. Here a gentleman living with his wife and another lady, Matilda, and getting tired of the latter, releases her early lover, Rogero, who is imprisoned in an abbey. This unfortunate man, who has been eleven years a captive on account of his attachment to Matilda, is found in a living sepulchre. The scene shows a subterranean vault in the Abbey of Quedlinburgh, with coffins, scutcheons, death's heads and cross-bones ; while toads and other loathsome reptiles are seen traversing the obscurer parts of

the stage. Rogero appears in chains, in a suit of rusty armour, with his beard grown, and a cap of grotesque form upon his head. He sings the following plaintive ditty :—

“Whene’er with haggard eyes I view  
This dungeon that I’m rotting in,  
I think of those companions true  
Who studied with me at the U-  
-niversity of Gottingen,  
-niversity of Gottingen.

*(Weeps and pulls out a blue kerchief with which he wipes his eyes; gazing tenderly at it he proceeds:)*

“Sweet kerchief, checked with heavenly blue,  
Which once my love sat knotting in!  
Alas! Matilda then was true!  
At least, I thought so at the U-  
-niversity of Gottingen,  
-niversity of Gottingen.

*(Clanks his chains.)*

“Barbs! barbs! alas! how swift you flew,  
Her neat post waggon trotting in,  
Ye bore Matilda from my view;  
Forlorn I languished in the U-  
-niversity of Gottingen,  
-niversity of Gottingen.

“This faded form! this pallid hue!  
This blood my veins is clotting in,  
My years are many—they were few,  
When first I entered at the U-  
-niversity of Gottingen,  
-niversity of Gottingen.

“There first for thee my passion grew,  
Sweet! sweet Matilda Pottingen!  
Thou wast the daughter of my tu-  
-tor, law professor at the U-  
-niversity of Gottingen,  
-niversity of Gottingen.

“Sun, moon, and thou, vain world, adieu,  
That kings and priests are plotting in;  
Here doomed to starve on water gru-  
-el, never shall I see the U-  
-niversity of Gottingen,  
-niversity of Gottingen.”

The idea of making humour by the division of words may have been original in this case, but it was conceived and adopted by Lucilius, the first Roman satirist.

The "Progress of Man," by Canning and Hammond, is an ironical poem, deducing our origin and development according to the natural, and in opposition to the religious system. The argument proceeds in the following vein:—

"Let us a plainer, steadier theme pursue,  
Mark the grim savage scoop his light canoe,  
Mark the fell leopard through the forest prow,  
Fish prey on fish, and fowl regale on fowl;  
How Lybian tigers' chawdrons love assails,  
And warms, midst seas of ice, the melting whales;  
Cools the crimpt cod, fierce pangs to perch imparts,  
Shrinks shrivelled shrimps, but opens oysters' hearts;  
Then say, how all these things together tend  
To one great truth, prime object, and good end?

"First—to each living thing, whate'er its kind,  
Some lot, some part, some station is assigned  
The feathered race with pinions skim the air;  
Not so the mackerel, and still less the bear. . . .  
Ah! who has seen the mailed lobster rise,  
Clap her broad wings, and soaring claim the skies?  
When did the owl, descending from her bower,  
Crop, midst the fleecy flocks the tender flower;  
Or the young heifer plunge, with pliant limb,  
In the salt wave, and fish-like strive to swim?  
The same with plants—potatoes 'tatoes breed—  
Uncostly cabbage springs from cabbage seed,  
Lettuce from lettuce, leeks to leeks succeed,  
Nor e'er did cooling cucumbers presume  
To flower like myrtle, or like violets bloom;  
Man, only—rash, refined, presumptuous man,  
Starts from his rank, and mars Creation's plan;  
Born the free heir of Nature's wide domain,  
To art's strict limits bounds his narrowed reign,  
Resigns his native rights for meaner things,  
For faith and fetters, laws, and priests, and kings."

The "Anti-Jacobin" was continued under the name of the "Anti-Jacobin Review," and in this modified form lasted for upwards of twenty years. It was mostly a journal of passing events, but there were a few attempts at humour in its pages.

## CHAPTER X.

Wolcott—Writes against the Academicians—Tales of a  
 Hoy—"New Old Ballads"—"The Sorrows of Sunday"—  
 Ode to a Pretty Barmaid—Sheridan—Comic Situations—  
 "The Duenna"—Wits.

WOLCOTT, a native of Devonshire, was educated at Kingsbridge, and apprenticed to an apothecary. He soon discovered a genius for painting and poetry, and commenced to write about the middle of the last century as Peter Pindar. He composed many odes on a variety of humorous subjects, such as "The Lousiad," "Ode to Ugliness," "The Young Fly and the Old Spider," "Ode to a Handsome Widow," whom he apostrophises as "Daughter of Grief," "Solomon and the Mouse-trap," "Sir Joseph Banks and the Boiled Fleas," "Ode to my Ass," "To my Candle," "An Ode to Eight Cats kept by a Jew," whom he styles, "Singers of Israel." Lord Nelson's night-cap took fire as the poet was wearing it reading in bed, and he returned it to him with the words,

"Take your night-cap again, my good lord, I desire,  
For I wish not to keep it a minute,  
What belongs to a Nelson, where'er there's a fire,  
Is sure to be instantly in it."

In "Bozzi and Piozzi" the former says:—

"Did any one, that he was happy cry,  
Johnson would tell him plumply 'twas a lie;  
A lady told him she was really so,  
On which he sternly answered, 'Madam, no!  
Sickly you are, and ugly, foolish, poor,  
And therefore can't be happy, I am sure.'"

UPON POPE.

"Grant me an honest fame, or grant me none,'  
Says Pope, (I don't know where,) a little liar,  
Who, if he praised a man, 'twas in a tone  
That made his praise like bunches of sweet-briar,  
Which, while a pleasing fragrance it bestows,  
Pops out a pretty prickle on your nose."

He seems to have gained little by his early poems, many of which were directed against the Royal Academicians. One commences:—

"Sons of the brush, I'm here again!  
At times a Pindar and Fontaine,  
Casting poetic pearl (I fear) to swine!  
For, hang me, if my last years odes  
Paid rent for lodgings near the gods,  
Or put one sprat into this mouth divine."

Sometimes he calls the Academicians, "Sons of Canvas;" sometimes "Tagrags and bob-tails of the sacred brush." He afterwards wrote a doleful elergy, "The Sorrows of Peter," and seems not to have thought himself sufficiently patronized, alluding to which he says—

"Much did King Charles our Butler's works admire,  
Read them and quoted them from morn to night,  
Yet saw the bard in penury expire,  
Whose wit had yielded him so much delight."

Wolcott was a little restricted by a due re-

gard for religion or social decorum. He reminds us of Sterne, often atoning for a transgression by a tender and elevated sentiment. The following from the "Tales of a Hoy," supposed to be told on a voyage from Margate gives a good specimen of his style—

*Captain Noah.* Oh, I recollect her. Poor Corinna!\* I could cry for her, Mistress Bliss—a sweet creature! So kind! so lovely! and so good-natured! She would not hurt a fly! Lord! Lord! tried to make every body happy. Gone! Ha! Mistress Bliss, gone! poor soul. Oh! she is in Heaven, depend on it—nothing can hinder it. Oh, Lord, no, nothing—an angel!—an angel by this time—for it must give God very little trouble to make *her* an angel—she was so charming! Such terrible figures as my Lord C. and my Lady Mary, to be sure, it would take at least a month to make such ones anything like angels—but poor Corinna wanted very few repairs. Perhaps the sweet little soul is now seeing what is going on in our cabin—who knows? Charming little Corinna! Lord! how funny it was, for all the world like a rabbit or a squirrel or a kitten at play. Gone! as you say, Gone! Well now for her epitaph.

#### CORINNA'S EPITAPH.

"Here sleeps what was innocence once, but its snows  
Were sullied and trod with disdain;  
Here lies what was beauty, but plucked was its rose  
And flung like a weed to the plain.

"O pilgrim! look down on her grave with a sigh  
Who fell the sad victim of art,  
Even cruelty's self must bid her hard eye  
A pearl of compassion impart.

"Ah! think not ye prudes that a sigh or a tear  
Can offend of all nature the God!  
Lo! Virtue already has mourned at her bier  
And the lily will bloom on her sod."

He wrote some pretty "new-old" ballads—purporting to have been written by Queen Elizabeth, Sir T. Wyatt, &c., on light and generally

\* A girl, who had been unfortunate in love.



amorous subjects. Much of his satire was political, and necessarily fleeting.

In "Orson and Ellen" he gives a good description of the landlord of a village inn and his daughter,

"The landlord had a red round face  
Which some folks said in fun  
Resembled the Red Lion's phiz,  
And some, the rising Sun.

"Large slices from his cheeks and chin  
Like beef-steaks one might cut;  
And then his paunch, for goodly size  
Beat any brewer's butt.

"The landlord was a boozier stout  
A snufftaker and smoker;  
And 'twixt his eyes a nose did shine  
Bright as a red-hot poker.

"Sweet Ellen gave the pot with hands  
That might with thousands vie:  
Her face like veal, was white and red  
And sparkling was her eye.

"Her shape, the poplar's easy form  
Her neck the lily's white  
Soft heaving, like the summer wave  
And lifting rich delight.

"And o'er this neck of globe-like mould  
In ringlets waved her hair;  
Ah, what sweet contrast for the eye  
The jetty and the fair.

"Her lips, like cherries moist with dew  
So pretty, plump, and pleasing,  
And like the juicy cherry too  
Did seem to ask for squeezing.

"Yet what is beauty's use alack!  
To market can it go?  
Say—will it buy a loin of veal,  
Or round of beef? No—no.

"Will butchers say 'Choose what you please  
Miss Nancy or Miss Betty?'  
Or gardeners, 'Take my beans and peas  
Because you are so pretty?'"

He wrote a pleasant satire on the tax upon hair-powder introduced by Pitt, and the shifts to which poor people would be put to hide their hair. He seems to have been as inimical as most people to taxation. He parodies Dryden's "Alexander's Feast:"

"Of taxes now the sweet musician sung  
The court and chorus joined  
And filled the wondering wind,  
And taxes, taxes, through the garden rung.

"Monarch's first of taxes think  
Taxes are a monarch's treasure  
Sweet the pleasure  
Rich the treasure  
Monarchs love a guinea clink. . . ."

He was, as we may suppose, averse to making Sunday a severe day. He wrote a poem against those who wished to introduce a more strict observance of Sunday, and called it, "The Sorrows of Sunday." He says:

"Heaven glorieth not in phizzes of dismay  
Heaven takes no pleasure in perpetual sobbing,  
Consenting freely that my favourite day,  
May have her tea and rolls, and hob-and-nobbing;  
Life with the down of cygnets may be clad  
Ah! why not make her path a pleasant track—  
No! cries the pulpit Terrorist (how mad)  
No! let the world be one huge hedge-hog's back."

He wrote a great variety of gay little sonnets, such as "The Ode to a Pretty Barmaid:"

"Sweet nymph with teeth of pearl and dimpled chin,  
And roses, that would tempt a saint to sin,  
Daily to thee so constant I return,  
Whose smile improves the coffee's every drop  
Gives tenderness to every steak and chop  
And bids our pockets at expenses spurn.

“What youth well-powdered, of pomatum smelling  
Shall on that lovely bosom fix his dwelling?  
Perhaps the waiter, of himself so full!  
With thee he means the coffee-house to quit  
Open a tavern and become a wit  
And proudly keep the head of the Black Bull.

“’Twas here the wits of Anna’s Attic age  
Together mingled their poetic rage,  
Here Prior, Pope, and Addison and Steele,  
Here Parnel, Swift, and Bolingbroke and Gay  
Poured their keen prose, and turned the merry lay  
Gave the fair toast, and made a hearty meal.

“Nymph of the roguish smile, which thousands seek  
Give me another, and another steak,  
A kingdom for another steak, but given  
By thy fair hands, that shame the snow of heaven. . . .”

He seems to have some misgivings about  
conjugal felicity:—

“An owl fell desperately in love, poor soul,  
Sighing and hooting in his lonely hole—  
A parrot, the dear object of his wishes  
Who in her cage enjoyed the loaves and fishes  
In short had all she wanted, meat and drink  
Washing and lodging full enough I think.”

Poll takes compassion on him and they  
are duly married—

“A day or two passed amorously sweet  
Love, kissing, cooing, billing, all their meat,  
At length they both felt hungry—‘What’s for dinner?’  
Pray, what have we to eat my dear,’ quoth Poll.  
‘Nothing,’ by all my wisdom, answered Owl.  
‘I never thought of that, as I’m a sinner  
But Poll on something I shall put my pats  
What sayst thou, deary, to a dish of rats?’  
‘Rats—Mister Owl, d’ye think that I’ll eat rats,  
Eat them yourself or give them to the cats,’  
Whines the poor bride, now bursting into tears:  
‘Well, Polly, would you rather dine on mouse  
I’ll catch a few if any in the house;’  
‘I won’t eat rats, I won’t eat mice—I won’t  
Don’t tell me of such dirty vermin—don’t

O, that within my cage I had but tarried.  
'Polly,' quoth owl, 'I'm sorry I declare  
So delicate you relish not our fare  
You should have thought of that before you married.'"

"The Ode to the Devil," is in reality a severe satire upon human nature under an unpleasant form. He says that men accuse the devil of being the cause of all the misdoings with which they are themselves solely chargeable, moreover that in truth they are very fond of him, and guilty of gross ingratitude in calling him bad names:—

"O Satan! whatsoever gear  
Thy Proteus form shall choose to wear  
Black, red, or blue, or yellow  
Whatever hypocrites may say  
They think thee (trust my honest lay)  
A most bewitching fellow.

"'Tis now full time my ode should end  
And now I tell thee like a friend,  
Howe'er the world may scout thee  
Thy ways are all so wondrous winning  
And folks so very fond of sinning  
They cannot do without thee."

Sheridan was one of those writers to whose pecuniary distresses we owe the rich treasure he has bequeathed. His brother and his best friend confided to him that they were both in love with Miss Linley, a public singer, and his romantic or comic nature suggested to him that while they were competing for the prize, he might clandestinely carry it off. Succeeding in his attempt, he withdrew his wife from her profession, and was ever afterwards in difficulties.

He seems in his comedies to have a love of sudden strokes and surprises, approaching almost to practical jokes, and very successful when upon the stage. A screen is thrown down and Lady Teazle discovered behind it—a sword instead of a trinket drops out of Captain Absolute's coat—the old duenna puts on her mistress' dress—all these produce an excellent effect without showing any very great power of humour. But he was celebrated as a wit in society—was full of repartee and pleasantry, and we are surprised to find that his plays only contain a few brilliant passages, and that their tissue is not more generally shot through with threads of gold.

In comparison with the other dramatists of whom we have spoken, we observe in Sheridan the work of a more modern age. We have here no indelicacy or profanity, excepting the occasional oath, then fashionable; but we meet that satirical play on the manners and sentiments of men, which distinguishes later humour. In *Mrs. Malaprop*, we have some of that confusion of words, which seems to have been traditional upon the stage. Thus, she says that Captain Absolute is the very "pine-apple of perfection," and that to think of her daughter's marrying a penniless man, gives her the

“hydrostatics.” She does not wish her to be a “progeny of learning,” but she should have a “supercilious knowledge” of accounts, and be acquainted with the “contagious countries.” There is a satire, which will come home to most of us in Malaprop, notwithstanding her ignorance and stupidity, giving her opinion authoritatively on education. She says that Lydia Languish has been spoiled by reading novels, in which Sir Anthony agrees. “Madam, a circulating library in a town is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year, and depend on it, Mrs. Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last.” Not only Mrs. Malaprop, but also Sir Anthony, form an entirely wrong estimate of themselves. The latter tells his son that he must marry the woman he selects for him, although she have the “skin of a mummy, and beard of a Jew.” On his son objecting, he tells him not to be angry. “So you will fly out! Can’t you be cool like me? What the devil good can a passion do? Passion is of no service, you impudent, violent, over-bearing reprobate. There, you sneer again! don’t provoke me!—but you rely on the mildness of my temper, you do, you dog!”

Sheridan’s humour is generally of this strong

kind—very suitable for stage effect, but not exquisite as wit. Hazlitt admits this in very complimentary terms:—

“His comic muse does not go about prying into obscure corners, or collecting idle curiosities, but shows her laughing face, and points to her rich treasure—the follies of mankind. She is garlanded and crowned with roses and vine leaves. Her eyes sparkle with delight, and her heart runs over with good-natured malice.”

Sheridan often aims at painting his scenes so as to be in antithesis to ordinary life. In *Faulkland* we have a lover so morbidly sensitive, that even every kindness his mistress shows him, gives him the most exquisite pain. Don Ferdinand is much in the same state. *Lydia Languish* is so romantic, that she is about to discard her lover—with whom she intended to elope—as soon as she hears he is a man of fortune. In *Isaac the Jew*, we have a man who thinks he is cheating others, while he is really being cheated. Sir Peter Teazle's bickering with his wife is well known and appreciated. The subject is the oldest which has tempted the comic muse, and still is, unhappily, always fresh. The following extracts are from “*The Duenna*”—

Isaac says to Father Paul that “he looks the very priest of Hymen!”

*Paul.* In short I may be called so, for I deal in repentance and mortification.

*Don Antonio.* But thou hast a good fresh colour in thy face, father, i' faith!

*Paul.* Yes. I have blushed for mankind till the hue of my shame is as fixed as their vices.

*Isaac.* Good man!

*Paul.* And I have laboured too, but to what purpose? they continue to sin under my very nose.

*Isaac.* Effects, fasher, I should have guessed as much for your nose seems to be put to the blush more than any other part of your face.

Don Jerome's song is worthy of Gay:—

“If a daughter you have she's the plague of your life  
No peace shall you know though you've buried your wife,  
At twenty she mocks at the duty you taught her,  
Oh! what a plague is an obstinate daughter!

Sighing and whining,

Dying and pining,

Oh, what a plague is an obstinate daughter!

“When scarce in their teens they have wit to perplex us,  
With letters and lovers for ever they vex us:  
While each still rejects the fair suitor you've brought her;  
O! what a plague is an obstinate daughter!

Wrangling and jangling,

Flouting and pouting,

Oh, what a plague is an obstinate daughter.”

One of Sheridan's strong situations is produced in this play. Don Jerome gives Isaac a glowing description of his daughter's charms; but when the latter goes to see her, the Duenna personates her.

*Isaac.* Madam, the greatness of your goodness overpowers me, that a lady so lovely should deign to turn her beauteous eyes on me, so. (*He turns and sees her.*)

*Duenna.* You seem surprised at my condescension.

*Isaac.* Why yes, madam, I am a little surprised at it. (*Aside*) This can never be Louisa—She's as old as my mother! . . .

*Duenna.* Signor, won't you sit?

*Isaac.* Pardon me, Madam, I have scarcely recovered my astonishment at—your condescension, Madam. (*Aside*) She has the devil's own dimples to be sure.

*Duenna.* I do not wonder, Sir, that you are surprised at my affability. I own, Signor, that I was vastly prepossessed against you, and being teased by my father, did



give some encouragement to Antonio; but then, Sir, you were described to me as a quite different person.

*Isaac.* Ay, and so you were to me upon my soul, Madam.

*Duenna.* But when I saw you, I was never more struck in my life.

*Isaac.* That was just my case too, Madam; I was struck all in a heap for my part.

*Duenna.* Well, Sir, I see our misapprehension has been mutual—you have expected to find me haughty and averse, and I was taught to believe you a little black, snub-nosed fellow, without person, manner, or address.

*Isaac.* Egad, I wish she had answered her picture as well.

After this interview, Don Jerome asks him what he thinks of his daughter.

*Don Jerome.* Well, my good friend, have you softened her?

*Isaac.* Oh, yes, I have softened her.

*Don J.* Well, and you were astonished at her beauty, hey?

*Isaac.* I was astonished, indeed. Pray how old is Miss?

*Don J.* How old? let me see—twenty.

*Isaac.* Then upon my soul she is the oldest looking girl of her age in Christendom.

*Don J.* Do you think so? but I believe you will not see a prettier girl.

*Isaac.* Here and there one.

*Don J.* Louisa has the family face.

*Isaac.* Yes, egad, I should have taken it for a family face, and one that has been in the family some time too.

*Don J.* She has her father's eyes.

*Isaac.* Truly I should have guessed them to be so. If she had her mother's spectacles I believe she would not see the worse.

*Don J.* Her aunt Ursula's nose, and her grandmother's forehead to a hair.

*Isaac.* Ay, faith, and her grandmother's chin to a hair.

Sheridan, as we have observed, was not more remarkable as a dramatist than as a man of society, and passed for what was called a "wit." The name had been applied two centuries before to men of talent generally,

especially to writers, but now it referred exclusively to such as were humorous in conversation. These men, though to a certain extent the successors of the parasites of Greece, and the fools of the middle ages, were men of education and independence, if not of good family, and rather sought popularity than any mercenary remuneration. The majority of them, however, were gainers by their pleasantry, they rose into a higher grade of society, were welcome at the tables of the great, and derived many advantages, not unacceptable to men generally poor and improvident. As Swift well observed, though not unequal to business, they were above it. Moreover, the age was one in which society was less varied than it is now in its elements and interests; when men of talent were more prominent, and it was easier to command an audience. It was known to all that Mr. —— was coming, and guests repaired to the feast, not to talk, but to listen, as we should now to a public reading. The greatest joke and treat was to get two of such men, and set them against each other, when they had to bring out their best steel; although it sometimes happened, that both refused to fight. We need scarcely say that the humour which was produced in such quantities to supply immediate demand was not of the best kind, and that a large part of

it would not have been relished by the fastidious critics of our own day. But some of these "wits" were highly gifted, they were generally literary men, and many of their good sayings have survived. The two who obtained the greatest celebrity in this field, seem to have been Theodore Hook and Sydney Smith. Selwyn, a precursor of these men, was so full of banter and impudence that George II. called him "that rascal George." "What does that mean," said the wit one day, musingly—"‘rascal’? Oh, I forgot, it was an hereditary title of all the Georges." Perhaps Selwyn might have been called a "wag"—a name given to men who were more enterprising than successful in their humour, and which referred originally to mere ludicrous motion.

## CHAPTER XI.

Southey—Drolls of Bartholomew Fair—The “Doves”—  
 Typographical Devices—Puns—Poems of Abel Shuffe-  
 bottom.

WE have already mentioned the name of Southey. By far the greater part of his works are poetical and sentimental, and hence some doubt has been thrown upon the authorship of his work called “The Doctor.” But in his minor poems we find him verging into humour, as where he pleads the cause of the pig and dancing bear, and even of the maggot. The last named is under the head of “The Filbert,” and commences—

“Nay gather not that filbert, Nicholas,  
 There is a maggot there; it is his house—  
 His castle—oh! commit not burglary!  
 Strip him not naked; ’tis his clothes, his shell;  
 His bones, the case and armour of his life,  
 And thou shalt do no murder, Nicholas.  
 It were an easy thing to crack that nut,  
 Or with thy crackers or thy double teeth;  
 So easily may all things be destroyed!  
 But ’tis not in the power of mortal man  
 To mend the fracture of a filbert shell.  
 There were two great men once amused themselves  
 Watching two maggots run their wriggling race,  
 And wagering on their speed; but, Nick, to us  
 It were no sport to see the pampered worm

Roll out and then draw in his folds of fat  
Like to some barber's leathern powder bag  
Wherewith he feathers, frosts or cauliflowers,  
Spruce beau, or lady fair, or doctor grave."

Also his *Commonplace Book* proves that, like many other hardworking men, he amused his leisure hours with what was light and fantastic. Moreover, he speaks in some places of the advantage of intermingling amusement and instruction—

"Even in literature a leafy style, if there be any fruit under the foliage, is preferable to a knotty one however fine the grain. Whipt cream is a good thing, and better still when it covers and adorns that amiable compound of sweetmeats and ratafia cakes soaked in wine, to which Cowper likened his delightful poem, when he thus described 'The Task'—

"'It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me to drop a word in favour of religion. In short there is some froth, and here and there some sweetmeat which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a 'trifle.' But in 'task' or 'trifle' unless the ingredients were good the whole were nought. They who should present to their deceived guests whipt white of egg would deserve to be whipt themselves."

But Southey by no means follows the profitable rule he here lays down. On the contrary, he sometimes betrays such a love of the marvellous as would seem unaccountable, had we not read bygone literature, and observed how strong the feeling was even as late as the days of the "*Wonderful Magazine*." Among

his strange fancies we find in the "Chapter on Kings:."

"There are other monarchies in the inferior world beside that of the bees, though they have not been registered by naturalists nor studied by them. For example, the king of the fleas keeps his court at Tiberias, as Dr. Clark discovered to his cost, and as Mr. Cripps will testify for him."

He proceeds to give humorous descriptions of the king of monkeys, bears, codfish, oysters, &c.

Again—

"Would not John Dory's name have died with him, and so been long ago dead as a door-nail, if a grotesque likeness for him had not been found in the fish, which being called after him, has immortalized him and his ugliness? But if John Dory could have anticipated this sort of immortality when he saw his own face in the glass, he might very well have 'blushed to find it fame.'"

He is fond of introducing quaint old legends—

"There are certain Rabbis who affirm that Eve was not taken out of Adam's side, but that Adam had originally been created with a tail, and that among the various experiments and improvements which were made in form and organization before he was finished, the tail was removed as an inconvenient appendage, and of the excrescence or superfluous part, which was then lopped off, the woman was formed."

While on this subject he says that Lady Jekyll once asked William Wiston "Why woman was formed out of man's rib rather than out of any other part of his body?" Wiston scratched his head and replied, "Indeed, Madam, I do not know, unless it be that the rib is the most crooked part of the body."

Southey gives a playbill of the Drolls of

## Bartholomew Fair in the time of Queen Anne—

“At Crawley’s booth over against the Crown Tavern in Smithfield, during the time of the Bartholomew Fair, will be presented a little opera, called the ‘Old Creation of the World,’ yet newly revived, with the addition of ‘Noah’s Flood.’ Also several fountains playing water during the time of the play. The last scene does represent Noah and his family coming out of the Ark, with all the beasts two and two, and all the fowls of the air seen in a prospect sitting upon trees. Likewise over the Ark is seen the sun rising in a most glorious manner. Moreover, a multitude of angels will be seen in a double rank, which represents a double prospect, one for the sun, the other for a palace, where will be seen six angels ringing of bells. Likewise machines descend from above, double and treble, with Dives rising out of Hell, and Lazarus seen in Abraham’s bosom; besides several figures, dancing jigs, sarabands, and country dances to the admiration of the spectators, with the merry conceits of Squire Punch and Sir John Spendall.”

“So recently as the year 1816 the sacrifice of Isaac was represented on the stage at Paris. Samson was the subject of the ballet; the unshorn son of Manoah delighted the spectators by dancing a solo with the gates of Gaza on his back; Delilah clipt him during the intervals of a jig, and the Philistines surrounded and captured him in a country-dance.”

Sometimes Southey indulges his fancy on very trifling subjects as,

“The Doves, father as well as son, were blest with a hearty intellectual appetite, and a strong digestion, but the son had the more Catholic taste. He would have relished caviare, would have ventured on laver, undeterred by its appearance, and would have liked it. He would have eaten sausages for breakfast at Norwich, sally-luns at Bath, sweet butter in Cumberland, orange marmalade at Edinburgh, Findon haddocks at Aberdeen, and drunk punch with beefsteaks to oblige the French, if they insisted upon obliging him with a *déjeuner à l’Anglaise*.

‘A good digestion turneth all to health.’

“He would have eaten squab pie in Devonshire, and the pie which is squabber than squab in Cornwall; sheep’s-head with the hair on in Scotland, and potatoes roasted on the hearth in Ireland, frogs with the French, pickled-herrings with the Dutch, sour-kROUT with the Germans,

macaroni with the Italians, aniseed with the Spaniards, garlic with anybody, horse-flesh with the Tartars, ass-flesh with the Persians, dogs with the North-Western American Indians, curry with the Asiatic East Indians, bird's-nests with the Chinese, mutton roasted with honey with the Turks, pismire cakes on the Orinoco, and turtle and venison with the Lord Mayor, and the turtle and venison he would have preferred to all the other dishes, because his taste, though Catholic, was not indiscriminating." . . . . .

"At the time of which I am now speaking, Miss Trewbody was a maiden lady of forty-seven in the highest state of preservation. The whole business of her life had been to take care of a fine person, and in this she had succeeded admirably. Her library consisted of two books; 'Nelson's Festivals and Fasts' was one, the other was the 'Queen's Cabinet Unlocked;' and there was not a cosmetic in the latter which she had not faithfully prepared. Thus by means, as she believed, of distilled waters of various kinds, maydew and buttermilk, her skin retained its beautiful texture still and much of its smoothness, and she knew at times how to give it the appearance of that brilliancy which it had lost. But that was a profound secret. Miss Trewbody, remembering the example of Jezebel, always felt conscious that she had committed a sin when she took the rouge-box in her hand, and generally ejaculated in a low voice 'The Lord forgive me!' when she laid it down; but looking in the glass at the same time she indulged a hope that the nature of the temptation might be considered an excuse for the transgression. Her other great business was to observe with the utmost precision all the punctilios of her situation in life, and the time which was not devoted to one or other of these worthy occupations was employed in scolding her servants and tormenting her niece. This kept the lungs in vigorous health; nay it even seemed to supply the place of wholesome exercise, and to stimulate the system like a perpetual blister, with this peculiar advantage, that instead of an inconvenience it was a pleasure to herself, and all the annoyance was to her dependents.

"Miss Trewbody lies buried in the Cathedral at Salisbury, where a monument was erected to her memory, worthy of remembrance itself for its appropriate inscription and accompaniments. The epitaph recorded her as a woman eminently pious, virtuous and charitable, who lived universally respected, and died sincerely lamented by all who had the happiness of knowing her. This inscription was upon a marble shield supported by two



Cupids, who bent their heads over the edge with marble tears larger than gray peas, and something of the same colour, upon their cheeks. These were the only tears that her death occasioned, and the only Cupids with whom she had ever any concern."

Southey introduces into this work a variety of extracts from rare and curious books—stories about Job beating his wife, about surgical experiments tried upon criminals, about women with horns, and a man who swallowed a poker, and "looked melancholy afterwards." Well might he suppose that people would think this farrago a composite production of many authors, and he says that if it were so he might have given it instead of the "Doctor" a name to correspond with its heterogeneous origin, such as—Isdis Roso Heta Harco Samro Grobe Thebo Heneco, Thojamma &c., the words continuing gradually to increase in length till we come to

Salacoharcojotacoherecosaheco.

After reading such flights as the above, we are surprised to find him despising the jester's bauble—

"Now then to the gentle reader. The reason why I do not wear cap and bells is this.

"There are male caps of five kinds, which are worn at present in this kingdom, to wit, the military cap, the collegiate cap, and the night-cap. Observe, reader, I said *kinds*, that is to say in scientific language *genera*—for the *species* and *varieties* are numerous, especially in the former genus.

"I am not a soldier, and having long been weaned from Alma Mater, of course have left off my college cap. The gentlemen of the hunt would object to my going out with

bells on; it would be likely to frighten their horses; and were I to attempt it, it might involve me in unpleasant disputes. To my travelling cap the bells would be an inconvenient appendage; nor would they be a whit more comfortable upon my night cap. Besides, my wife might object to them. It follows that if I would wear a cap and bells, I must have a cap made on purpose. But this would be rendering myself singular; and of all things, a wise man will avoid ostentatious appearance of singularity. Now I am certainly not singular in playing the fool without one."

There is much in the style of the "Doctor," which reminds us of Sterne. He was evidently a favourite author with Southey, who speaking of his Sermons says, "You often see him tottering on the verge of laughter, and ready to throw his periwig in the face of the audience." Perhaps from him he acquired his love for tricks of form and typographical surprises. He introduces what he calls interchapters. "Leap chapters they cannot properly be called, and if we were to call them 'Ha-has' as being chapters, which the reader may skip if he likes, the name would appear rather strange than significant."

He sometimes introduces a chapter without any heading in the following way—

"Sir," says the Compositor to the Corrector of the Press "there is no heading for the copy for this chapter. What must I do?"

"Leave a space for it," the Corrector replies. "It is a strange sort of book, but I dare say the author has a reason for everything he says or does, and most likely you will find out his meaning as you set up."

Chapter lxxxviii begins—"While I was writing that last chapter a flea appeared upon

the page before me, as there once did to St. Dominic." He proceeds to say that his flea was a flea of flea-flesh, but that St. Dominic's was the devil.

Southey was particularly fond of acoustic humour. He represents Wilberforce as saying of the unknown author of the Doctor—Pooo-oo-oo-oo-r crēēēa-ture." Perhaps his familiarity with the works of Nash, Decker, and Rabelais suggested his word coming.

One of the interchapters begins with the word *Aballiboozobanganorribo*.

He questions in the "Poultry Yard" the assertion of Aristotle that it is an advantage for animals to be domesticated. The statement is regarded unsatisfactory by the fowl—replies to it being made by Chick-pick, Hen-pen, Cock-lock, Duck-luck, Turkey-lurkey, and Goosey-loosey.

He occasionally coins words such as Potamology for the study of rivers, and Chapter cxxxiv is headed—

"A transition, an anecdote, an apostrophe, and a pun, punnet, or pundigrion."

He proposes in another chapter to make a distinction between masculine and feminine in several words.

"The troublesome affection of the diaphragm which every person has experienced is to be called according to the sex of the patient—He-cups or She-cups—which upon the principle of making our language truly British is better

than the more classical form of Hiccup and Hœccups. In the Objective use, the word becomes Hiscups or Hercups and in like manner Histerics should be altered into Herterics—the complaint never being masculine.”

The Doctor is rich in variety of verbal humour—

“When a girl is called a lass, who does not perceive how that common word must have arisen? who does not see that it may be directly traced to a mournful interjection *Alas!* breathed sorrowfully forth at the thought that the girl, the lovely innocent creature upon whom the beholder has fixed his meditative eye, would in time become a woman—a woe to man.”

Our Doctor flourished in an age when the pages of Magazines, were filled with voluntary contributions from men who had never aimed at dazzling the public, but came each with his scrap of information, or his humble question, or his hard problem, or his attempt in verse—

“A was an antiquary, and wrote articles upon Altars and Abbeys and Architecture. B made a blunder which C corrected. D demonstrated that E was in error, and that F was wrong in Philology, and neither Philosopher nor Physician though he affected to be both. G was a Genealogist. H was a Herald who helped him. I was an inquisitive inquirer, who found reason for suspecting J to be a Jesuit. M was a Mathematician. N noted the weather. O observed the stars. P was a poet, who produced pastorals, and prayed Mr. Urban to print them. Q came in the corner of the page with a query. R arrogated to himself the right of reprehending every one, who differed from him. S sighed and sued in song. T told an old tale, and when he was wrong U used to set him right; V was a virtuoso. W warred against Warburton. X excelled in Algebra. Y yearned for immortality in rhyme, and Z in his zeal was always in a puzzle.”

We have already observed that the pictorial representations of demons, which were originally

intended to terrify, gradually came to be regarded as ludicrous. There was something decidedly grotesque in the stories about witches and imps, and Southey, deep in early lore, was remarkable for developing a branch of humour out of them. In one place he had a catalogue of devils, whose extraordinary names he wisely recommends his readers not to attempt to pronounce, "lest they should loosen their teeth or fracture them in the operation." Comic demonology may be said to have been out of date soon after time.

Southey is not generally amatory in his humour, and therefore we appreciate the more the following effusions, which he facetiously attributes to Abel Shufflebottom. The gentleman obtained Delia's pocket-handkerchief, and celebrates the acquisition in the following strain—

"'Tis mine! what accents can my joy declare?  
Blest be the pressure of the thronging rout,  
Blest be the hand, so hasty, of my fair,  
And left the tempting corner hanging out!

"I envy not the joy the pilgrim feels,  
After long travel to some distant shrine,  
When at the relic of his saint he kneels,  
For Delia's pocket-handkerchief is mine.

"When first with filching fingers I drew near,  
Keen hope shot tremulous through every vein,  
And when the finished deed removed my fear,  
Scarce could my bounding heart its joy contain.

"What though the eighth commandment rose to mind,  
It only served a moment's qualm to move;  
For thefts like this it could not be designed,  
The eighth commandment was not made for love.

"Here when she took the macaroons from me,  
She wiped her mouth to clear the crumbs so sweet,  
Dear napkin! Yes! she wiped her lips in thee,  
Lips sweeter than the macaroons she eat.

"And when she took that pinch of Mocabau,  
That made my love so delicately sneeze,  
Thee to her Roman nose applied I saw,  
And thou art doubly dear for things like these.

"No washerwoman's filthy hand shall e'er,  
Sweet pocket-handkerchief, thy worth profane,  
For thou hast touched the rubies of my fair,  
And I will kiss thee o'er and o'er again."

In another Elegy he expatiates on the beauty of Delia's locks;—

"Happy the *friseur* who in Delia's hair,  
With licensed fingers uncontrolled may rove;  
And happy in his death the dancing bear,  
Who died to make pomatum for my love.

"Fine are my Delia's tresses as the threads  
That from the silk-worm, self-interred, proceed,  
Fine as the gleamy gossamer that spreads  
Its filmy web-work over the tangled mead.

"Yet with these tresses Cupid's power elate  
My captive heart hath handcuffed in a chain,  
Strong as the cables of some huge first-rate,  
That bears Britannia's thunders o'er the main.

"The Sylphs that round her radiant locks repair,  
In flowing lustre bathe their brightened wings,  
And elfin minstrels with assiduous care,  
The ringlets rob for fairy fiddlestrings."

Of course Shufflebottom is tempted to another theft—a rape of the lock—for which he incurs the fair Delia's condign displeasure —

"She heard the scissors that fair lock divide,  
And while my heart with transport panted big,  
She cast a fiery frown on me, and cried,  
'You stupid puppy—you have spoilt my wig.'"

## CHAPTER XII.

Lamb—His Farewell to Tobacco—Pink Hose—On the Melancholy of Tailors—Roast Pig.

NO one ever so finely commingled poetry and humour as Charles Lamb. In his transparent crystal you are always seeing one colour through another, and he was conscious of the charm of such combinations, for he commends Andrew Marvell for such refinement. His early poems printed with those of Coleridge, his schoolfellow at Christ's Hospital, abounded with pure and tender sentiment, but never arrested the attention of the public. We can find in them no promise of the brilliancy for which he was afterwards so distinguished, except perhaps in his "Farewell to Tobacco," where for a moment he allowed his Pegasus to take a more fantastic flight.

"Scent, to match thy rich perfume,  
Chemic art did ne'er presume,  
Through her quaint alembic strain,  
None so sovereign to the brain ;  
Nature that did in thee excel,  
Framed again no second smell,  
Roses, violets, but toys  
For the smaller sort of boys,

Or for greener damsels meant,  
Thou art the only manly scent."

But although forbidden to smoke, he still hopes he may be allowed to enjoy a little of the delicious fragrance at a respectful distance—

"And a seat too 'mongst the joys  
Of the blest Tobacco Boys;  
Where though I, by sour physician,  
Am debarred the full fruition  
Of thy favours, I may catch  
Some collateral sweets, and snatch  
Sidelong odours that give life-  
Like glances from a neighbour's wife,  
And still live in thee by places  
And the suburbs of thy graces;  
And in thy borders take delight,  
An unconquered Canaanite."

His early years brought forth another kind of humour which led to his being appointed jester to the "Morning Post." He was paid at the rate of sixpence a joke, furnished six a day, and depended upon this remuneration for his supplementary livelihood—everything beyond mere bread and cheese. As humour, like wisdom, is found of those who seek her not, we may suppose the quality of these productions was not very good. He thus bemoans his irksome task, which he performed generally before breakfast—

"No Egyptian task-master ever devised a slavery like to that, our slavery. No fractious operants ever turned out for half the tyranny, which this necessity exercised upon us. Half-a-dozen jests in a day, (bating Sundays too,) why, it seems nothing! We make twice the number every day in our lives as a matter of course, and claim no Sabbatical exemptions. But then they come into our



head. But when the head has to go out to them—when the mountain must go to Mahomet. Readers, try it for once, only for some short twelvemonth.”

Lamb, however, only obtained this undesirable appointment by a coincidence he thus relates,—

“A fashion of flesh—or rather pink-coloured hose for the ladies luckily coming up when we were on our probation for the place of Chief Jester to Stuart’s Paper, established our reputation. We were pronounced a ‘capital hand.’ O! the conceits that we varied upon *red* in all its prismatic differences! . . . Then there was the collateral topic of ankles, what an occasion to a truly chaste writer like ourself of touching that nice brink and yet never tumbling over it, of a seemingly ever approximating something ‘not quite proper,’ while like a skilful posture master, balancing between decorums and their opposites, he keeps the line from which a hair’s breadth deviation is destruction. . . . That conceit arrided us most at that time, and still tickles our midriff to remember where allusively to the flight of *Astrœa* we pronounced—in reference to the stockings still—that ‘Modesty, taking her final leave of mortals, her last blush was visible in her ascent to the Heavens by the track of the glowing instep.’”

References of a somewhat amatory character often make sayings acceptable, which for their intrinsic merit would scarcely raise a smile, and Lamb soon seriously deplored the loss of this serviceable assistance. He continues :—

“The fashion of jokes, with all other things, passes away as did the transient mode which had so favoured us. The ankles of our fair friends in a few weeks began to reassume their whiteness, and left us scarce a leg to stand upon. Other female whims followed, but none methought so pregnant, so invitatory of shrewd conceits, and more than single meanings.”

He tells us that Parson Este and Topham

brought up the custom of witty paragraphs first in the "World," a doubtful statement—and that even in his day the leading papers began to give up employing permanent wits. Many of our provincial papers still regale us with a column of facetiæ, but machine-made humour is not now much appreciated. We require something more natural, and the jests in these papers now consist mostly of extracts from the works, or anecdotes from the lives of celebrated men. The pressure thus brought to bear upon Lamb for the production of jests in a given time led him to indulge in very bad puns, and to try to justify them as pleasant eccentricities. What can be expected from a man who tells us that "the worst puns are the best," or who can applaud Swift for having asked, on accidentally meeting a young student carrying a hare; "Prithee, friend, is that your own hair or a wig?" He finds the charm in such hazards in their utter irrelevancy, and truly they can only be excused as flowing from a wild and unchastened fancy. It must require great joviality or eccentricity to find any humour in caricaturing a pun.

Speaking of the prospectus of a certain Burial Society, who promised a handsome plate with an angel above and a flower below, Lamb ventures—"Many a poor fellow, I dare swear,

has that Angel and Flower kept from the Angel and Punchbowl, while to provide himself a bier he has curtailed himself of beer.” But to record all Lamb’s bad puns would be a dull and thankless task. We will finish the review of his verbal humour by quoting a passage out of an indifferent farce he wrote entitled, “ Mr. H——.”

*(The hero cannot on account of his patronymic get any girl to marry him.)*

“ My plaguy ancestors, if they had left me but a Van, or a Mac, or an Irish O’, it had been something to qualify it— Mynheer Van Hogsflesh, or Sawney Mac Hogsflesh, or Sir Phelim O’Hogsflesh, but downright blunt—— If it had been any other name in the world I could have borne it. If it had been the name of a beast, as Bull, Fox, Kid, Lamb, Wolf, Lion; or of a bird, as Sparrow, Hawk, Buzzard, Daw, Finch, Nightingale; or of a fish, as Sprat, Herring, Salmon; or the name of a thing, as Ginger, Hay, Wood; or of a colour, as Black, Gray, White, Green; or of a sound, as Bray; or the name of a month, as March, May; or of a place, as Barnet, Baldock, Hitchen; or the name of a coin, as Farthing, Penny, Twopenny; or of a profession, as Butcher, Baker, Carpenter, Piper, Fisher, Fletcher, Fowler, Glover; or a Jew’s name, as Solomons, Isaacs, Jacobs; or a personal name, as Foot, Leg, Crookshanks, Heaviside, Sidebottom, Ramsbottom, Winterbottom; or a long name, as Blanchenhagen or Blanchhausen; or a short name as Crib, Crisp, Crips, Tag, Trot, Tub, Phips, Padge, Papps, or Prig, or Wig, or Pip, or Trip; Trip had been something, but Ho—!

*(Walks about in great agitation; recovering his coolness a little, sits down.)*

These were weaker points in Lamb, but we must also look at the other side. Those who have read his celebrated essay on Hogarth will find that he possesses no great appreciation for

that humour which is only intended to raise a laugh, and might conclude that he was more of a moralist than a humorist. He admires the great artist as an instructor, but admits that "he owes his immortality to his touches of humour, to his mingling the comic with the terrible." Those, he continues, are to be blamed who overlook the moral in his pictures, and are merely taken with the humour or disgusted by the vulgarity. Moreover, there is a propriety in the details; he notices the meaning in the tumbledown houses "the dumb rhetoric," in which "tables, chairs, and joint stools are living, and significant things." In these passages Lamb seems to regard the comic merely as a means to an end;—"Who sees not," he asks, "that the grave-digger in Hamlet, the fool in Lear have a kind of correspondency to, and fall in with, the subjects which they seem to interrupt; while the comic stuff in "Venice Preserved," and the doggrel nonsense of the cook and his poisoning associates in the Rollo of Beaumont and Fletcher are pure irrelevant, impertinent discords—as bad as the quarreling dog and cat under the table of our Lord and the Disciples at Emmaus, of Titian."

Lamb's interpretation of Hogarth's works is that of a superior and thoughtful mind: but we cannot help thinking that the humour in

them was not so entirely subordinate to the moral. One conclusion we may incidentally deduce from his remarks—that the meaning in pictorial illustrations, either as regards humour or sentiment, is not so appreciable as it would be in words, and consequently that caricatures labour under considerable disadvantages. “Much,” he says, “depends upon the habits of mind we bring with us.” And he continues—“It is peculiar to the confidence of high genius alone to trust much to spectators or readers,” he might have added that in painting, this confidence is often misplaced, especially as regards the less imaginative part of the public. We owe him a debt, however, for a true observation with regard to the general uses of caricatures, that “it prevents that disgust at common life which an unrestricted passion for ideal forms and beauties is in danger of producing.”

But leaving passages in which Lamb approves of absurd jesting, and those in which he commends humour for pointing a moral, we come to consider the largest and most characteristic part of his writings, his pleasant essays, in which he has neither shown himself a moralist or a mountebank.

The following is from an Essay “On the Melancholy of Tailors.”

“Observe the suspicious gravity of their gait. The peacock is not more tender, from a consciousness of his peculiar infirmity, than a gentleman of this profession is of being known by the same infallible testimonies of his occupation, “Walk that I may know thee.”

Who ever saw the wedding of a tailor announced in the newspapers, or the birth of his eldest son?

“When was a tailor known to give a dance, or to be himself a good dancer, or to perform exquisitely upon the tight rope, or to shine in any such light or airy pastimes? To sing, or play on the violin? Do they much care for public rejoicings, lightings up, ringing of bells, firing of cannons, &c.

“Valiant I know they be, but I appeal to those who were witnesses to the exploits of Eliot’s famous troop whether in their fiercest charges they betrayed anything of that thoughtless oblivion to death with which a Frenchman jigs into battle, or, whether they did not show more of the melancholy valour of the Spaniard upon whom they charged that deliberate courage which contemplation and sedentary habits breathe.”

Lamb accounts for this melancholy of tailors in several ingenious ways.

“May it not be that the custom of wearing apparel, being derived to us from the fall, and one of the most mortifying products of that unhappy event, a certain seriousness (to say no more of it) may in the order of things have been intended to have been impressed upon the minds of that race of men to whom in all ages the care of contriving the human apparel has been entrusted.”

He makes further comments upon their habits and diet, observing that both Burton and Galen especially disapprove of cabbage.

In “Roast Pig” we have one of those homely subjects which were congenial to Lamb.

“There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over roasted crackling—as it is well called—the very teeth are invited to their share of the pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the coy, brittle resistance—with the adhesive oleaginous—O

call it not fat—but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it—the tender blossoming of fat—fat cropped in the bud —taken in the shoot in the first innocence—the cream and quintessence of the child pig's yet pure food—the lean—no lean, but a kind of animal manna—or rather fat and lean (if it must be so) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one ambrosian result, or common substance.

“Behold him, while he is doing—it seemeth rather a refreshing warmth than a scorching heat, that he is passive to. How equably he twirleth round the string! Now he is just done. To see the extreme sensibility of that tender age; he hath wept out his pretty eyes—radiant jellies—shooting stars. . . . .

“His sauce should be considered. Decidedly a few bread crumbs done up with his liver and brains, and a dish of mild sage. But banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you the whole onion tribe. Barbecue your whole hogs to your palate, steep them in shalots, stuff them out with plantations of the rank and guilty garlic, you cannot poison them or make them sharper than they are—but consider he is a weakling—a flower.”

Lamb gives his opinion that you can no more improve sucking pig than you can refine a violet.

Thus he proceeds along his sparkling road—his humour and poetry gleaming one through the other, and often leaving us in pleasant uncertainty whether he is in jest or earnest. Though not gifted with the strength and suppleness of a great humorist, he had an intermingled sweetness and brightness beyond even the alchemy of Addison. We regret to see his old-fashioned figure receding from our view—but he will ever live in remembrance as the most joyous and affectionate of friends.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Byron—Vision of Judgment—Lines to Hodgson—Beppo  
—Humorous Rhyming—Profanity of the Age.

MOORE considered that the original genius of Byron was for satire, and he certainly first became known by his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." Nevertheless, his humorous productions are very small compared with his sentimental. It might perhaps have been expected that his mind would assume a gloomy and cynical complexion. His personal infirmity, with which, in his childhood, even his mother was wont to taunt him, might well have begotten a severity similar to that of Pope. The pressure of friends and creditors led him, while a mere stripling, to form an uncongenial alliance with a stern puritan, who, while enjoying his renown, sought to force his soaring genius into the trammels of commonplace conventionalities. On his refusing, a clamour was raised against him, and those who were too dull to criticise his writings were fully equal to the task of finding fault with his



morals. It may be said that he might have smiled at these attacks, and conscious of his power, have replied to his social as well as literary critics

“Better to err with Pope than shine with Pye,” and so he might, had he possessed an imperturbable temper, and been able to forecast his future fame. But a man's career is not secure until it is ended, and the throne of the author is often his tomb. Moreover, the same hot blood which laid him open to his enemies, also rendered him impatient of rebuke. Coercion roused his spirit of opposition; he fell to replies and retorts, and to “making sport for the Philistines.” He would show his contempt for his foes by admitting their charges, and even by making himself more worthy of their vituperation. And so a great name and genius were tarnished and spotted, and a dark shadow fell upon his glory. But let us say he never drew the sword without provocation. In condemning the wholesale onslaught he made in the “Bards and Reviewers,” we must remember that it was a reply to a most unwarrantable and offensive attack made upon him by the “Edinburgh Review,” written as though the fact of the author being a nobleman had increased the spleen of the critic. It says:—

"The poesy of this young lord belongs to the class which neither gods nor men are said to permit. Indeed we do not recollect to have seen a quantity of verse with so few deviations in either direction for that exact standard. His effusions are spread over a dead flat, and can no more get above or below the level than if they were so much stagnant water. . . . We desire to counsel him that he forthwith abandon poetry and turn his talents, which are considerable, and his opportunities, which are great, to better account.\*

So his profanity in the "Vision of Judgment," was in answer to Southey's poem of that name, the introduction of which contained strictures against him. Accused of being Satanic, he replies with some profanity, and with that humour which he principally shows in such retorts—

"Saint Peter sat by the celestial gate,  
His keys wore rusty, and the lock was dull,  
So little trouble had been given of late—  
Not that the place by any means was full;  
But since the Gallic era 'eighty-eight'  
The devils had ta'en a longer, stronger pull,  
And 'a pull together,' as they say  
At sea—which drew most souls another way.

"The angels all were singing out of tune,  
And hoarse with having little else to do,  
Excepting to wind up the sun and moon,

---

\* Byron showed his love of humour even in some of these early effusions, speaking of his college he says:

"Our choir would scarcely be excused,  
Even as a band of raw beginners:  
All mercy, now, must be refused  
To such a set of croaking sinners.  
If David, when his toils were ended  
Had heard these blockheads sing before him,  
To us his psalms had ne'er descended;  
In furious mood, he would have tore 'em."

Or curb a runaway young star or two,  
Or wild colt of a comet, which too soon  
Broke out of bounds o'er the ethereal blue,  
Splitting some planet with its playful tail  
As boats are sometimes by a wanton whale."

The effect of Southey reading *his* "Vision of Judgment" is thus given:—

"Those grand heroics acted as a spell,  
The angels stopped their ears, and plied their pinions,  
The devils ran howling deafened down to hell,  
The ghosts fled gibbering, for their own dominions."

His poem on a lady who maligned him to his wife, seems to show that he did not well distinguish where the humorous ends and the ludicrous begins. He represents her—

"With a vile mask the Gorgon would disown  
A cheek of parchment and an eye of stone,  
Mark how the channels of her yellow blood  
Ooze at her skin, and stagnate there to mud,  
Cased like the centipede in saffron mail,  
A darker greenness of the scorpion's scale,  
Look on her features! and behold her mind  
As in a mirror of itself defined."

No one suffered more than Byron from his humour being misapprehended. His letters abound with jests and *jeux d'esprit*, which were often taken seriously as admissions of an immoral character. We gladly turn to something pleasanter—to some of the few humorous pieces he wrote in a genial tone—

EPIGRAM.

The world is a bundle of hay  
Mankind are the asses who pull  
Each tugs in a different way,  
The greatest of all is John Bull.

Lines to Mr. Hodgson (afterwards Provost of Eton) written on board the packet for Lisbon,

"Huzza! Hodgson, we are going,  
Our embargo's off at last,  
Favourable breezes blowing  
Bend the canvas o'er the mast,  
From aloft the signal's streaming  
Hark! the farewell gun is fired,  
Women screeching, tars blaspheming,  
Tell us that our time's expired.

Here's a rascal  
Come to task all,  
Prying from the custom house;  
Trunks unpacking,  
Cases cracking,  
Not a corner for a mouse,  
'Scapes unsearched amid the racket  
Ere we sail on board the packet. . . .

Now our boatmen quit the mooring,  
And all hands must ply the oar:  
Baggage from the quay is lowering,  
We're impatient, push from shore.  
"Have a care that case holds liquor—  
Stop the boat—I'm sick—oh Lord!"  
"Sick, ma'am, d—me, you'll be sicker,  
Ere you've been an hour on board."

Thus are screaming  
Men and women,  
Gemmen, ladies, servants, tacks;  
Here entangling,  
All are wrangling,  
Stuck together close as wax,  
Such the general noise and racket  
Ere we reach the Lisbon packet.

Fletcher! Murray! Bob! where are you?  
Stretched along the deck like logs—  
Bear a hand, you jolly tar, you!  
Here's a rope's end for the dogs.  
Hobhouse muttering fearful curses  
As the hatchway down he rolls,  
Now his breakfast, now his verses,  
Vomits forth and d—ns our souls.

In Beppo there is much gay carnival merri-  
ment and some humour—a style well suited to  
Italian revelry. When Laura's husband, Beppo,  
returns, and is seen in a new guise at a ball, we  
read—

“He was a Turk the colour of mahogany  
And Laura saw him, and at first was glad,  
Because the Turks so much admire philogyny,  
Although the usage of their wives is sad,  
’Tis said they use no better than a dog any  
Poor woman, whom they purchase like a pad;  
They have a number though they ne’er exhibits ’em,  
Four wives by law and concubines ’ad libitum.”

On being assured that he is her husband, she  
exclaims —

“*Beppo*. And are you really truly, now a Turk?  
With any other women did you wive?  
Is’t true they use their fingers for a fork?  
Well, that’s the prettiest shawl—as I’m alive!  
You’ll give it me? They say you eat no pork.  
And how so many years did you contrive  
To—Bless me! did I ever? No, I never  
Saw a man grown so yellow! How’s your liver?”

More than half the poem is taken up with  
digressions, more or less amusing, such as—

“Oh, mirth and innocence! Oh milk and water!  
Ye happy mixtures of more happy days!  
In these sad centuries of sin and slaughter  
Abominable man no more allays  
His thirst with such pure beverage. No matter,  
I love you both, and both shall have my praise!  
Oh, for old Saturn’s reign of sugar-candy!  
Meantime I drink to your return in brandy.”

We may observe that there is humour in the  
rhymes in the above stanzas. He often used  
absurd terminations to his lines as—

“For bating Covent garden, I can hit on  
No place that’s called Piazza in Great Britain.”

People going to Italy, are to take with them—

“Ketchup, Soy, Chili-vinegar and Harvey,  
Or, by the Lord! a Lent will well nigh starve ye.”

We are here reminded of the endings of some of Butler’s lines. Such rhymes were then regarded as poetical, but in our improved taste we only use them for humour. Lamb considered them to be a kind of punning, but in one case the same position, in the other the same signification is given to words of the same sound. The following couplet was written humorously by Swift for a dog’s collar—

“Pray steal me not: I’m Mrs. Dingley’s  
Whose heart in this four-footed thing lies.”

Pope has the well known lines,

“Worth makes the man and want of it the fellow,  
And all the rest is leather and prunella.”

Miss Sinclair also, in her description of the Queen’s visit to Scotland, has adopted these irregular terminations with good effect—

“Our Queen looks far better in Scotland than England  
No sight’s been like this since I once saw the King land.

Edina! long thought by her neighbours in London  
A poor country cousin by poverty undone;

The tailors with frantic speed, day and night cut on,  
While scolded to death if they misplace a button.

And patties and truffles are better for Verrey’s aid,  
And cream tarts like those which once almost killed  
Scherezade.”

The parallelism of poetry has undergone very many changes, but there has generally been an inclination to assimilate it to the style of chants or ballad music. The forms adopted may be regarded as arbitrary—the rythmical tendency of the mind being largely influenced by established use and surrounding circumstances. We cannot see any reason why rhymes should be terminal—they might be at one end of the line as well as at the other. We might have—

“Early rose of Springs first dawn,  
Pearly dewdrops gem thy breast,  
Sweetest emblem of our hopes,  
Meetest flower for Paradise.”

But there are signs that all this pedantry, graceful as it is, will gradually disappear. Blank verse is beginning to assert its sway, and the sentiment in poetry is less under the domination of measure. No doubt the advance to this freer atmosphere will be slow, music has already adopted a wider harmony. Ballads are being superseded by part singing, and airs by sonatas. The time will come when to produce a jingle at the end of lines will seem as absurd as the rude harmonies of Dryden and Butler now appear to us.

It would not be just to judge of the profanity of Byron by the standard of the present day.

We have seen that two centuries since parodies which to us would seem distasteful, if not profane, were written and enjoyed by eminent men. Probably Byron, a man of wide reading had seen them, and thought that he too might tread on unforbidden ground and still lay claim to innocence. The periodicals and collections of the time frequently published objectionable imitations of the language of Scripture and of the Liturgy, evidently ridiculing the peculiarities inseparable from an old-fashioned style and translation. In the "Wonderful Magazine" there was "The Matrimonial Creed," which sets forth that the wife is to bear rule over the husband, a law which is to be kept whole on pain of being "scolded everlastingly."

A litany supposed to have been written by a nobleman against Tom Paine, was in the following style.

THE POOR MAN'S LITANY.

"From four pounds of bread at sixteen-pence price,  
And butter at eighteen, though not very nice,  
And cheese at a shilling, though gnawed by the mice,  
Good Lord deliver us!"

The "Chronicles of the Kings of England," by Nathan Ben Sadi were also of this kind, parodies on Scripture were used at Elections on both sides, and one on the Te Deum against



Napoleon had been translated into all the European languages. But a most remarkable trial took place in the year 1817, that of William Hone for publishing profane parodies against the Government. From this we might have hoped that a better taste was at length growing up, but Hone maintained that the prosecution was undertaken on political grounds, and that had the satires been in favour of the Government nothing would have been said against them. He also complained of the profanity of his accuser, the Attorney-General, who was perpetually "taking the Lord's name in vain" during his speech. Some parts of Hone's publications seem to have debased the Church Services by connecting them with what was coarse and low, but the main object was evidently to ridicule the Regent and his Ministers, and this view led the jury to acquit him. Still there was no doubt that his satire reflected in both ways. His Catechism of a Ministerial member commenced—

*Question.* What is your name?

*Answer.* Lick-spittle.

*Ques.* Who gave you this name?

*Ans.* My Sureties to the Ministry in my political change, wherein I was made a member of the majority, the child of corruption, and a locust to devour the good things of this kingdom.

The supplications in his Litany were of the following kind—

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“O Prince! ruler of thy people, have mercy upon us thy miserable subjects.”

Some of Gillray's caricatures would not now be tolerated, such as that representing Hoche ascending to Heaven surrounded by Seraphim and Cherubim—grotesque figures with red night-caps and tri-coloured cockades having books before them containing the Marseillaise hymn. In another Pitt was going to heaven in the form of Elijah, and letting his mantle drop on the King's Ministers.

It must be admitted that there is often a great difficulty in deciding whether the intention was to ridicule the original writing or the subject treated in the Parody. A variety of circumstances may tend to determine the question on one side or the other, but regard should especially be had as to whether any imperfection in the original is pointed out. The fault may be only in form, but in the best travesties the sense and subject are also ridiculed, and with justice.

Such was the aim in the celebrated “Rejected Addresses,” and it was well carried out. This work now exhibits the ephemeral character of humour, for, the originals having fallen into obscurity, the imitations afford no amusement. But we can still appreciate a few, especially the two respectively commencing :—

“My brother Jack was nine in May,  
And I was eight on New Year's day;

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So in Kate Wilson's shop,  
Papa, (he's my papa and Jack's,)  
Bought me, last week, a doll of wax,  
And brother Jack a top." . . .

And—

- "O why should our dull retrospective addresses,  
Fall damp as wet blankets on Drury Lane fire?  
Away with blue devils, away with distresses,  
And give the gay spirit to sparkling desire.
- "Let artists decide on the beauties of Drury,  
The richest to me is when woman is there;  
The question of houses I leave to the jury;  
The fairest to me is the house of the fair."

The point in these will be recognised at once,  
as Wordsworth and Moore are still well known.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Theodore Hook—Improvisatore Talent—Poetry—Sydney Smith—The “Dun Cow”—Thomas Hood—Gin—Tylney Hall—John Trot—Barham’s Legends.

THEODORE HOOK was at Harrow with Lord Byron, and characteristically commenced his career there by breaking one of Mrs. Drury’s windows at the suggestion of that nobleman. His father was a popular composer of music, and young Theodore’s first employment was that of writing songs for him. This, no doubt, gave the boy a facility, and led to the great celebrity he acquired for his improvisatore talent. He was soon much sought for in society, and a friend has told me that he has heard him, on sitting down to the piano, extemporize two or three hundred lines, containing humorous remarks upon all the company. On one occasion, Sir Roderick Murchison was present, and some would have been a little puzzled how to bring such a name into rhyme, but he did not hesitate a moment running on:—

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“And now I'll get the purchase on,  
To sing of Roderick Murchison.”

Cowden Clark relates that when at a party and playing his symphony, Theodore asked his neighbour what was the name of the next guest, and then sang :—

“Next comes Mr. Winter, collector of taxes,  
And you must all pay him whatever he axes;  
And down on the nail, without any flummery;  
For though he's called Winter, his acts are all summary.”

Horace Twiss tried to imitate him in this way, but failed. Hook's humour was not of very high class. He was fond of practical jokes, such as that of writing a hundred letters to tradesmen desiring them all to send goods to a house on a given day. Sometimes he would surprise strangers by addressing some strange question to them in the street. He started the “John Bull” newspaper, in which he wrote many humorous papers, and amused people by expressing his great surprise, on crossing the Channel, to find that every little boy and girl could speak French.

He wrote cautionary verses against punning :—

“My little dears, who learn to read, pray early learn to shun  
That very silly thing, indeed, which people call a pun;  
Read Entick's rules, and 'twill be found how simple an  
offence

It is to make the self-same sound afford a double sense.

For instance, *ale* may make you *ail*, your *aunt* an *ant*  
may kill,

You in a *vale* may buy a *veil*, and *Bill* may pay the *bill*;  
Or if to France your bark you steer, at Dover it may be,  
A *peer* appears upon the *pier*, who blind still goes to sea”

But he was much given to the practice he condemns—here is an epigram—

“It seems as if Nature had cunningly planned  
That men’s names with their trades should agree,  
There’s Twining the tea-man, who lives in the Strand,  
Would be *whining* if robbed of his T.”

Mistakes of words by the uneducated are a very ordinary resource of humorists, but, of course, there is a great difference in the quality of such jests. Mrs. Ramsbottom in Paris, eats a *voulez-vous* of fowl, and some pieces of *crape*, and goes to the *symetery* of the *Chaise and pair*. Afterwards she goes to the *Hotel de Veal*, and buys some *sieve* jars to keep *popery* in.

Hook was a strong Tory, and some of his best humour was political. One of his squibs has been sometimes attributed to Lord Palmerston.

“Fair Reform, Celestial maid!  
Hope of Britons! Hope of Britons!  
Calls her followers to aid;  
She has fit ones, she has fit ones!  
They would brave in danger’s day,  
Death to win her! Death to win her;  
If they met not by the way,  
Michael’s dinner! Michael’s dinner!”

Alluding to a dinner-party which kept several Members from the House on the occasion of an important division.

Among his political songs may be reckoned “The Invitation” (from one of the Whig patronesses of the Lady’s Fancy Dress Ball,)

“Come, ladies, come, 'tis now the time for capering,  
Freedom's flag at Willis's is just unfurled,  
We, with French dances, will overcome French vapouring,  
And with ice and Roman punch amaze the world;  
There's I myself, and Lady L——, you'll seldom meet a  
    rummer set,  
With Lady Grosvenor, Lady Foley, and her Grace of  
Somerset,  
While Lady Jersey fags herself, regardless of the bustle,  
ma'am,  
With Lady Cowper, Lady Anne, and Lady William Rus-  
sell, ma'am.                   Come, ladies, come, &c.”

There is a sort of polite social satire running through Theodore Hook's works, but it does not exhibit any great inventive powers. In “*Byroniana*,” he ridicules the gossiping books written after Byron's death, pretending to give the minutest accounts of his habits and occasional observations—and generally omitting the names of their authority. Thus Hook tells us in a serio-comic tone:—

“He had a strong antipathy to pork when underdone or stale, and nothing could induce him to partake of fish which had been caught more than ten days—indeed, he had a singular dislike even to the smell of it. He told me one night that——told——that if——would only——him——she would——without any compunction: for her——, who though an excellent man, was no——, but that she never——, and this she told——and——as well as Lady——herself. Byron told me this in confidence, and I may be blamed for repeating it; but——can corroborate it; if it happens not to be gone to——”

The following written against an old-fashioned gentleman, Mr. Brown, who objects to the improvements of the age, is interesting. It is amusing now to read an ironical defence of steam, intended to ridicule the pretensions of its advocates.

"Mr. Brown sneers at steam and growls at gas. I contend that the utility of constructing a coach which shall go by hot water, nearly as fast as two horses can draw it at a trifling additional expense, promises to be wonderfully useful. We go too fast, Sir, with horses; besides, horses eat oats, and farmers live by selling oats; if, therefore, by inconveniencing ourselves, and occasionally risking our lives, we can, however imperfectly, accomplish by steam what is now done by horses, we get rid of the whole race of oat-sowers, oat-sellers, oat-eaters, and oat-stealers, vulgarly called ostlers."

Sydney Smith especially aimed at pleasantry in his humour, there was no animosity in it, and generally no instruction. Mirth, pure and simple, was his object. Rogers observes "After Luttrell, you remembered what good things he said—after Smith how much you laughed."

In Moore's Diary we read "at a breakfast at Roger's, Smith, full of comicality and fancy, kept us all in roars of laughter." His wit was so turned, that it never wounded. When he took leave of Lord Dudley, the latter said, "You have been laughing at me constantly, Sydney, for the last seven years, and yet in all that time, you never said a thing to me that I wished unsaid."

It would be superfluous to give a collection of Smith's good sayings, but the following is characteristic of his style. When he heard of a small Scotchman going to marry a lady of large dimensions, he exclaimed,

"Going to marry her? you mean a part of her, he could not marry her all. It would be not bigamy but trigamy. There is enough of her to furnish wives for a whole parish.



You might people a colony with her, or give an assembly with her, or perhaps take your morning's walk round her, always providing there were frequent resting-places and you were in rude health. I was once rash enough to try walking round her before breakfast, but only got half-way, and gave up exhausted."

Smith's humour was nearly always of this continuous kind, "changing its shape and colour to many forms and hues." He wished to continue the merriment to the last, but such repetition weakened its force. His humour is better when he has some definite aim in view, as in his letters about America, where he lost his money. But we have not many specimens of it in his writings, the following is from "The Dun Cow :"—

"The immense importance of a pint of ale to a common man should never be overlooked, nor should a good-natured Justice forget that he is acting for Lilliputians, whose pains and pleasures lie in very narrow compass, and are but too apt to be treated with neglect and contempt by their superiors. About ten or eleven o'clock in the morning, perhaps, the first faint shadowy vision of a future pint of beer dawns on the fancy of the ploughman. Far, very far is it from being fully developed. Sometimes the idea is rejected; sometimes it is fostered. At one time he is almost fixed on the 'Red Horse,' but the blazing fire and sedulous kindness of the landlady of the 'Dun Cow' shake him, and his soul labours! Heavy is the ploughed land, dark, dreary, and wet the day. His purpose is at last fixed for beer! Threepence is put down for the vigour of the ale, and one penny for the stupefaction of tobacco, and these are the joys and holidays of millions, the greatest pleasure and relaxation which it is in the power of fortune to bestow."

Such kindly feelings as animated Sydney Smith were found more fully developed in Thomas Hood. He made his humour minister

to philanthropy. 'The man who wrote the "Song of the Shirt" felt keenly for all the sufferings of the poor—he even favoured some of their unreasonable complaints. Thus he writes the "Address of the Laundresses to the Steam Washing Company," to show how much they are injured by such an institution. In a "Drop of Gin," he inveighs against this destructive stimulant.

"Gin! gin! a drop of gin!  
What magnified monsters circle therein,  
Ragged and stained with filth and mud,  
Some plague-spotted, and some with blood."

He seems not to be well pleased with Mr. Bodkin, the Secretary for the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity—

"Hail! king of shreds and patches, hail!  
Dispenser of the poor!  
Thou dog in office set to bark  
All beggars from the door!"

"Of course thou art what Hamlet meant  
To wretches, the last friend;  
What ills can mortals have that can't  
With a bare *bodkin* end."

Mr. M'Adam is apostrophized—

"Hail Roadian, hail Colossus, who dost stand,  
Striding ten thousand turnpikes on the land?  
Oh, universal Leveller! all hail!"

In a sporting dialogue in "Tylney Hall," we have—

"'A clever little nag, that,' said the Squire, after a long one-eyed look at the brown mare, 'knows how to go, capital action.'

"'A picture, isn't she?' said the Baronet. I bought her last week by way of a surprise to Ringwood. She was

bred by old Toby Sparks at Hollington, by Tiggumbob out of Tolderol, by Diddledumkins, Cockalorum, and so forth.

“‘An odd fish, old Toby;’ said the Squire, ‘always give ’em queer names: can jump a bit, no doubt?’

“‘She jumps like a flea,’ said Dick, ‘and as for galloping, she can go from anywhere to everywhere in forty minutes—and back again.’”

We may also mention his description of an old-fashioned doctor.

“At first sight we were in doubt whether to set him down as a doctor or a pedagogue, for his dress presented one very characteristic appendage of the latter, namely a square cut black coat, which never was, never would be, and probably never had been, in fashion. A profusion of cambric frills, huge silver shoe-buckles, a snuff-box of the same metal, and a gold-headed cane belonging rather to the costume of the physician of the period. He wore a very precise wig of a very decided brown, regularly crisped at the top like a bunch of endive, and in front, following the exact curves of the arches of two bushy eyebrows. He had dark eyes, a prominent nose, and a wide mouth—the corners of which in smiling were drawn towards his double chin. A florid colour on his face hinted a plethoric habit, while a portly body and a very short thick neck bespoke an apoplectic tendency. Warned by these indications, prudence had made him a strict water-drinker, and abstemious in his diet—a mode of treatment which he applied to all his patients short or tall, stout or thin, with whom whatever their disease, he invariably began by reducing them, as an arithmetician would say, to their lowest terms. This mode of treatment raised him much in the estimation of the parish authorities.”

The humour in the following is of a lighter and more tricksy kind—

WRITTEN IN A YOUNG LADY'S ALBUM.

“Upon your cheek I may not speak,  
Nor on your lip be warm,  
I must be wise about your eyes,  
And formal with your form;  
Of all that sort of thing, in short,  
On T. H. Bayly's plan,  
I must not twine a single line,  
I'm not a single man.”

On hearing that Grimaldi had left the stage,  
he enumerates his funny performances—

“Oh, who like thee could ever drink,  
Or eat—smile—swallow—bolt—and choke,  
Nod, weep, and hiccup—sneeze and wink?  
Thy very gown was quite a joke!  
Though Joseph Junior acts not ill,  
‘There’s no fool like the old fool still.’”

His felicity in playing with words is well  
exhibited in the stanzas on “John Trot.”

- “John Trot he was as tall a lad  
As York did ever rear,  
As his dear granny used to say,  
He’d make a Grenadier.
- “A serjeant soon came down to York  
With ribbons and a frill;  
My lad, said he, let broadcast be,  
And come away to drill.
- “But when he wanted John to ‘list,  
In war he saw no fun,  
Where what is call’d a raw recruit,  
Gets often over-done.
- “Let others carry guns, said he,  
And go to war’s alarms,  
But I have got a shoulder-knot  
Imposed upon my arms.
- “For John he had a footman’s place,  
To wait on Lady Wye,  
She was a dumpy woman, tho’  
Her family was high.
- “Now when two years had passed away  
Her lord took very ill,  
And left her to her widowhood,  
Of course, more dumpy still.
- “Said John, I am a proper man,  
And very tall to see,  
Who knows, but now her lord is low  
She may look up to me?
- “‘A cunning woman told me once  
Such fortune would turn up,  
She was a kind of sorceress,  
But studied in a cup.’”

- "So he walked up to Lady Wye,  
And took her quite amazed,  
She thought though John was tall enough  
He wanted to be raised.
- "But John—for why? she was a dame  
Of such a dwarfish sort—  
Had only come to bid her make  
Her mourning very short.
- "Said he, 'your lord is dead and cold,  
You only cry in vain,  
Not all the cries of London now,  
Could call him back again.
- "'You'll soon have many a noble beau,  
To dry your noble tears,  
But just consider this that I  
Have followed you for years.
- "'And tho' you are above me far,  
What matters high degree,  
When you are only four foot nine,  
And I am six foot three?
- "'For though you are of lofty race,  
And I'm a low-born elf,  
Yet none among your friends could say,  
You matched beneath yourself.'
- "Said she, 'such insolence as this  
Can be no common case;  
Though you are in my service, Sir,  
Your love is out of place.'
- "'O Lady Wye! O Lady Wye!  
Consider what you do;  
How can you be so short with me,  
I am not so with you!'
- "Then ringing for her serving-men,  
They show'd him to the door;  
Said they, 'you turn out better now,  
Why didn't you before?'
- "They stripp'd his coat, and gave him kicks  
For all his wages due,  
And off instead of green and gold  
He went in black and blue.
- "No family would take him in  
Because of this discharge,  
So he made up his mind to serve  
The country all at large.

“ ‘Huzza!’ the serjeant cried, and put  
The money in his hand,  
And with a shilling cut him off  
From his paternal land.

“ For when his regiment went to fight  
At Saragossa town,  
A Frenchman thought he look’d too tall,  
And so he cut him down.”

Barham’s humour, as seen in his “Ingoldsby Legends,” is of a lower character, but shows that the author possessed a great natural facility. He had keen observation, but his taste did not prevent his employing it on what was coarse and puerile. Common slang abounds, as in “The Vulgar Little Boy;” he talks of “the devil’s cow’s tail,” and is little afraid of extravagances. His metre often assists him, and we have often comic rhyming as where “Mephistopheles” answers to “Coffee lees,” and he says:—

“To gain your sweet smiles, were I Sardanapalus,  
I’d descend from my throne, and be boots at an alehouse.”

But in raising a laugh and affording a pleasant distraction by fantastic humour on common subjects, the “Ingoldsby Legends” have been highly successful, and they are recommended by an occasional historical allusion, especially at the expense of the old monks. Being written by a man of knowledge and cultivation, they rise considerably above the standard of the contributions to lower class comic papers, which in some respects they resemble.

## CHAPTER XVI.

Douglas Jerrold—Liberal Politics—Advantages of Ugliness  
—Button Conspiracy—Advocacy of Dirt—The “Genteel  
Pigeons.”

THERE is an earnestness and a political complexion in the humour of Douglas Jerrold, such as might be expected from a man who had been educated in the school of adversity. He was born in a garret at Sheerness, where his father was manager of the theatre; and as he grew up in the seaport among ships, sailors and naval preparations, his ambition was fired, and he entered the service as a midshipman. On his return, after a short period, he found his father immersed in difficulties, due probably to the inactivity at the seaport in time of peace. Many a man has owed his success in life partly to his following his father's profession, and here fortune favoured Jerrold, as his maritime experiences assisted him as a writer for the stage. We can easily understand how “Black-eyed Susan” would move the hearts of sailors returning after a long voyage. Meanwhile the inner power and energy of the

man developed itself in many directions; he perfected himself in Latin, French and Italian literature, wrote "leaders" for the "Morning Herald," and articles for Magazines. All his works were short, and those which were most approved never assumed an important character. The most successful enterprise in his career was his starting "Punch," in conjunction with Gilbert' A-Beckett and Mark Lemon.

Jerrold was a staunch and sturdy liberal, and his original idea was that of a periodical to expose every kind of hypocrisy, and fraud, and especially to attack the strongholds of Toryism. "Punch" owed much at its commencement to the pen of Jerrold, and has well retained its character for fun, although it scarcely now represents its projector's political ardour.

His conversation overflowed with pleasantry, and in conversation he sometimes hazarded a pun, as when he asked Talfourd whether he had any more "Ions" in the fire. But the critic, who says that "every jest of his was a gross incivility made palatable by a pun," is singularly infelicitous, for as a humorous writer he is almost unique in his freedom from verbal humour. His style is often adagial or exaggerated, and we are constantly meeting such sentences as ;



"Music was only invented to gammon human nature, and that is the reason that women are so fond of it."

"A fellow from a horsepond will know anybody who's a supper and a bed to give him."

"To whip a rascal for his rags is to pay flattering homage to cloth of gold."

"A suspicious man would search a pincushion for treason, and see daggers in a needle case."

"Wits, like drunken men with swords, are apt to draw their steel upon their best acquaintance."

"What was talked of as the golden chain of love, was nothing but a succession of laughs, a chromatic scale of merriment reaching from earth to Olympus."

St. Giles' and St. James' is written to show that "St. James in his brocade may probably learn of St. Giles in his tatters." It abounds in quaint and humorous moralizing. Here is a specimen—

"We cannot say if there really be not a comfort in substantial ugliness: ugliness that unchanged will last a man his life, a good granite face in which there shall be no wear or tear. A man so appointed is saved many alarms, many spasms of pride. Time cannot wound his vanity through his features; he eats, drinks, and is merry in spite of mirrors. No acquaintance starts at sudden alteration, hinting in such surprise, decay and the final tomb. He grows old with no former intimates—churchyard voices—crying "How you're altered." How many a man might have been a truer husband, a better father, firmer friend, more valuable citizen, had he, when arrived at legal maturity, cut off, say—an inch of his nose. This inch—only an inch!—would have destroyed the vanity of the very handsomest face, and so driven the thought of a man from a vulgar looking-glass, a piece of shop crystal—and more, from the fatal mirrors carried in the heads of women, to reflect heaven knows how many coxcombs who choose to stare into them—driven the man to the glass of his own mind. With such small sacrifice he might have been a philosopher. Thus considered, how many a coxcomb may be within an inch of a sage!"

In another passage of the same book we read—

"Was there not Whitlow, beadle of the parish of St. Scraggs? What a man-beast was Whitlow! how would he, like an avenging ogre, scatter apple-women! how would he foot little boys guilty of peg-tops and marbles! how would he puff at a beggar—puff like the picture of the north wind in a spelling book! What a huge heavy purple face he had, as though all the blood of his body were stagnant in his cheeks! and then when he spoke, would he not growl and snuffle like a dog? How the parish would have hated him, but that the parish heard there was a Mrs. Whitlow; a small fragile woman, with a face sharp as a penknife, and lips that cut her words like scissors! and what a forlorn wretch was Whitlow with his head brought once a night to the pillow! poor creature! helpless, confused; a huge imbecility, a stranded whale! Mrs. Whitlow talked and talked; and there was not an apple-woman that in Whitlow's sufferings was not avenged: not a beggar that, thinking of the beadle at midnight, might not in his compassion have forgiven the beadle of the day. And in this punishment we acknowledge a grand, a beautiful retribution. A Judge Jeffreys in his wig is an abominable tyrant; yet may his victims sometimes smile to think what Judge Jeffreys suffers in his night cap!"

It is almost unnecessary to observe that the writer of Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures was somewhat severe upon the fair sex. His idea of a perfect woman is that of one who is beautiful, "and can do everything but speak." In the "*Chronicles of Clovernook*"—*i.e.* of his little retreat near Herne Bay—he gives an account of the Hermit of Bellyfulle, who lives in "the cell of the corkscrew," and among many amusing paradoxes, maintains the following,

"Ay, Sir, the old story—the old grievance, Sir, 'twixt man and woman," said the hermit.

"And what is that, Sir?" we asked.

The hermit shaking his head, and groaning cried, "Buttons."

"Buttons!" said we.

Our hermit drew himself closer to the table, and spreading his arms upon it, leaned forward with the serious air

of a man prepared to discuss a grave thing. "Buttons," he repeated. Then clearing his throat he began, "In the course of your long and, I hope, well spent life, has it never come with thunderbolt conviction on you that all washerwomen, clear-starchers, getters up of fine linen, or under whatever name Eve's daughters—for as Eve brought upon us the stern necessity of a shirt, it is but just that her girls should wash it—under whatever name they cleanse and beautify flax and cotton, that they are all under some compact, implied or solemnly entered upon amongst themselves and their non-washing, non-starching, non-getting up sisterhood, that by means subtle and more mortally certain, they shall worry, coax, and drive all bachelors and widowers soever into the pound of irredeemable wedlock? Has this tremendous truth, sir, never struck you?"

"How?—by what means?" we asked.

"Simply by buttons," answered the hermit, bringing down his clenched fist upon the table,

"We knew it—we looked incredulous.

"See here, sir," said the Hermit, leaning still farther across the table, "I will take a man, who on his outstart in life, set his hat a-cock at matrimony—a man who defies Hymen and all his wicked wiles. Nevertheless, sir, the man must have a shirt, the man must have a washerwoman, Think you that that shirt returning from the tub, never wants one, two—three buttons? Always, sir, always. Sir, though I am now an anchorite I have lived in your bustling world, and seen—ay, quite as much as anyone of its manifold wickedness. Well, the man—the buttonless man—at first calmly remonstrates with his laundress. He pathetically wrings his wrists at her, and shows his condition. The woman turns upon him her wainscot face and promises amendment. The thing shall never happen again. Think you the next shirt has its just and lawful number of buttons? Devil a bit!"

In "The Bright Poker," he seems to pay a compliment under a guise of sarcasm:—

"And here my dear child, let me advise you to avoid by all means what is called a clean wife. You will be made to endure the extreme of misery under the base, the invidious pretext of being rendered comfortable. Your house will be an ark tossed by continual floods. You will never know what it is to properly accommodate your shoulders to a shirt, so brief will be its visit to your back ere it again go to the washtub. And then for spiders, fleas, and other household insects, sent especially into our

homesteads to awaken the enquiring spirit of man, to at once humble his individual pride by the contemplation of their sagacity, and to elevate him by the frequent evidence of the marvels of animal life—all these calls upon our higher faculties will be wanting, and lacking them your immortal part will be dizzied, stunned by the monotony of the scrubbing-brush, and poisoned past the remedy of perfume by yellow soap. Your wife and children, too, will have their faces continually shining like the holiday saucers on the mantel-piece. Now consider the conceit, the worse than arrogance of this; the studied callous forgetfulness of the beginning of man. Did he not spring from the earth?—from clay—dirt—mould—mud—garden soil, or composition of some sort, for theological geology (you must look in the dictionary for these words) has not precisely defined what; and is it not the basest impudence of pride to seek to wash and scrub and rub away the original spot? Is he not the most natural man who in vulgar meaning is the dirtiest? Depend upon it, there is a fine natural religion in dirt; and yet we see men and women strive to appear as if they were compounded of the roses and lilies in Paradise instead of the fine rich loam, that feeds their roots. Be assured of it, there is great piety in what the ignorant foolishly call filth. Take some of the Saints for an example—off with their coats, and away with their hair shirts; and even then, my son, so intently have they considered and been influenced by the lowly origin of man, that with the most curious eye, and most delicate finger, you shall not be able to tell where either saint or dirt begins or ends”

In a “Man made of Money,” we have something original—a dialogue between two fleas, as they stand on the brow of Mr. Jericho—

“‘My son,’ says the elder, ‘true it is, man feeds for us. Man is the labouring chemist for the fleas; for them he turns the richest meats and spiciest drinks to flea wine. Nevertheless, and I say it with much pain, man is not what he was. He adulterates our tipple most wickedly.’

“‘I felt it with the last lodgers,’ says the younger flea. ‘They drank vile spirits, their blood was turpentine with, I fear, a dash of vitriol. How they lived at all, I know not. I always had the headache in the morning. Here however,’ and the juvenile looked steadfastly down upon the plain of flesh, the wide champaign beneath him—‘here we have promise of better fare.’”

But Douglas Jerrold’s best humour is usually

rather in the narrative and general issue than in any sudden hits or surprises. His "Sketches of The English" are humorous and admirably drawn, but it would be difficult to produce a single striking passage out of them. One of the most amusing stories in his collection of "Cakes and Ale" is called "The Genteel Pigeons."—A newly married couple return home before the end of the honeymoon, but wish to keep their arrival secret. George Tomata, a connection of the family, but unknown to Pigeon, calls at the house, and is denied admittance by the servant, but Pigeon, happening to come down asks if he has any message of importance to transact—

"'Not in the least, no—not at all,' answered Tomata leisurely ascending the stairs, and with Mr Pigeon entering the drawing-room, 'So, the Pigeons are not at home yet eh?'"

"'Mr. and Mrs. Pigeon the day of their marriage,' answered Pigeon softly, 'went to Brighton.'"

"'Ha! well, that's not three weeks yet. Of course, Sir, you are intimate with Mr. Pigeon?'"

"'I have the pleasure, sir,' said Samuel."

"'You lodge here, no doubt? Excuse me, although I have not with you the pleasure—and doubtless it is a very great one—of knowing Pigeon, still I am very intimate with his little wife.'"

"'Indeed, Sir. I never heard her name—'"

"'I dare say not, Sir; I dare say not. Oh very intimate; we wore petticoats together. Baby companions, sir—baby companions—used to bite the same pear.'"

"'Really sir,'—and Pigeon shifted in his seat—'I was not aware of so early and delicate a connection between yourself and Mrs. Pigeon.'"

"'We were to have been married, yes, I may say, the wedding-ring was over the first joint of her finger.'"

"'And pray, sir,' asked Pigeon, with a face of crimson,

'pray, sir, what accident may have drawn the ring off again?'

"'You see, sir,' said George Tomata, arranging his hair by an opposite mirror, 'my prospects lay in India—in India, sir. Now Lotty—'

"'Who, sir?' exclaimed Pigeon, wrathfully.

"'Charlotte,' answered Tomata. 'I used to call her Lotty, and she—he! he!—she used to call me 'Love-apple.' You may judge how far we were both gone. For when a woman begins to play tricks with a man's name you may be sure she begins to look upon it as her future property.'

"'You are always right, sir, no doubt,' observed Pigeon, 'but you were about to state the particular hindrance to your marriage with'—

"'To be sure, Lotty—as I was going to observe, was a nice little sugar-plum, a very nice little sugar-plum—as you will doubtless allow.'

"It was with much difficulty that Pigeon possessed himself of sufficient coolness to admit the familiar truth of the simile; he however admitted the wife of his bosom to be a nice little sugar-plum.

"'Very nice indeed, but I saw it—I felt convinced of it, and the truth went like twenty daggers to my soul—but I discovered—'

"'Good heavens,' exclaimed Pigeon, 'discovered what?'

"'That her complexion,' replied Tomata, 'beautiful as it was would not stand Trincomalee.'

"'And was that your sole objection to the match?' inquired Pigeon solemnly.

"'I give you my honour as a gentleman that I had no other motive for breaking off the marriage. Sir, I should have despised myself, if I had; for, as I observed, we were both gone—very far gone indeed.'

"'No doubt, sir,' answered Pigeon, burning to avow himself. 'But as a friend of Mr. Pigeon, allow me to assure you that the lady was not found too far gone to admit of a perfect recovery.'

"'I'm glad of it; hope it is so. By the way what sort of a fellow is Pigeon? Had I been in London—I only came up yesterday—I should have looked into the match before it took place. Lotty could expect no less of me. What kind of an animal is this Pigeon?'

"'Kind of an animal, sir?' stammered Pigeon. 'Why, sir, he—'

"'Ha! that will do,' said the abrupt Tomata, 'as you're his friend I'll not press you on that point. Poor Lotty—sacrificed I see!'

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After more amusing dialogue he throws his card on the table and says he shall call, adding,

“‘If Pigeon makes my Lotty a good husband, I’ll take him by the hand; if, however, I find him no gentleman—find that he shall use the girl of my heart with harshness, or even with the least unkindness——’

“‘Well, sir!’—Pigeon thrusting his hands into his pockets swaggered to Tomata—‘what will you do then, sir?’

“‘Then, sir. I shall again think the happiness of the lady placed in my hands and thrash him—thrash him severely.’”

## CHAPTER XVII.

Thackeray—His Acerbity—The Baronet—The Parson—  
Medical Ladies—Glorvina—"A Serious Paradise."

**T**HACKERAY resembled Lamb in the all-pervading character of his humour. He adorned with it almost everything he touched, but did not enter into it heart and soul, like a man of really joyous mirth-loving disposition. His pages teem with sly hits and insinuations, but he never developes a comic scene, and we can scarcely find a single really laughable episode in the whole course of his works. So little did he grasp or finish such pictures that we rarely select a passage from Thackeray for recitation. He thought more of plot and stratagem than of humour, and used the latter, not for its own sake, but mostly to give brilliance to his narrative, to make his figures prominent, and his remarks salient. He thus silvers unpalatable truths, and although he disowns being a moralist, we generally see some substratum of earnestness peeping through the eddies of his fancy. With him, humour is



subservient. And he speaks from his inner self, when he exclaims, "Oh, brother wearers of motley ! Are there not moments when one grows sick of grinning and tumbling, and the jingling of the cap and bells."

We may say that much of Thackeray's humour is more inclined to produce a grin than a smile—merely to cause a grimace, owing to the bitterness from which it springs. It must be remembered, however, that the greater part of modern wit consists of sarcastic criticism, though it is not generally severe.

In Thackeray we do not find any of that consciousness of the imbecility of man, which made some French writers call the humour of Democritus "melancholy." The "Vanity" of which he speaks is not that universal emptiness alluded to by the surfeited author of Ecclesiastes, nor has it even the ordinary signification of personal conceit. No ; he implies something more culpable, such immorality as covetousness, deception, vindictiveness, and hypocrisy. He approaches the Roman Satirists in the relentless hand with which he exposes vice. Some of his characters are monstrous, and almost grotesque in selfishness, as that of Becky Sharp, to whom he does not allow one good quality. Cunning and unworthy

motives add considerably to the zest of his humour. He says—

“This history has Vanity Fair for a title, and Vanity Fair is a very vain foolish place, full of all sorts of hum-bugs and falseness and pretentions. One is bound to speak the truth, as one knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells, or a shovel hat; and a deal of disagreeable matter must come out in the course of such an undertaking.”

Here is his description of a baronet, Sir Pitt Crawley;—

“The door was opened by a man in dark breeches and gaiters with a dirty coat, a foul old neck cloth lashed round his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a leering red face, a pair of twinkling grey eyes, and a mouth perpetually on the grin.

“‘This Sir John Pitt Crawley’s?’ says John, from the box.

“‘Ees,’ says the man at the door, with a nod.

“‘Hand down these ere trunks then,’ said John.

“‘Hand ’n down yourself,’ said the porter.

“‘Don’t you see I can’t leave my horses? Come bear a hand, my fine feller, and Miss will give you some beer,’ said John, with a hoarse laugh.

“The bald-headed man, taking his hands out of his breeches pockets, advanced on this summons, and throwing Miss Sharp’s trunk over his shoulder, carried it into the house.

“On entering the dining room by the orders of the individual in gaiters, Rebecca found that apartment not more cheerful than such rooms usually are when genteel families are out of town . . . Two kitchen chairs and a round table and an attenuated old poker and tongs were however gathered round the fire place, as was a saucepan over a feeble sputtering fire. There was a bit of cheese and bread, and a tin candlestick on the table, and a little black porter in a pint pot.

“‘Had your dinner, I suppose? It is too warm for you? Like a drop of beer?’

“‘Where is Sir Pitt Crawley?’ said Miss Sharp majestically.

“‘He, he! I’m Sir Pitt Crawley. Reclect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! Ask Tinker if I ayn’t. Mrs. Tinker, Miss Sharp, Miss Governess, Mrs. Charwoman, ho ho!’

"The lady addressed as Mrs. Tinker, at this moment made her appearance with a pipe and paper of tobacco, for which she had been dispatched a minute before Miss Sharp's arrival; and she handed the articles over to Sir Pitt, who had taken his seat by the fire.

"Where's the farden?' says he, 'I gave you three half-pence. Where's the change, old Tinker?'

"There,' replied Mrs. Tinker, flinging down the coin, 'it's only baronets as cares about farthings.'

"A farthing a day is seven shillings a year,' answered the M.P., 'seven shillings a year is the interest of seven guineas. Take care of your farthings, old Tinker, and your guineas will come quite nat'ral.' . . .

"And so with injunctions to Miss Sharp to be ready at five in the morning, he bade her good night, 'You'll sleep with Tinker to-night,' he said, 'it's a big bed, and there's room for two. Lady Crawley died in it. Good night.'"

He sums up Sir Pitt's character by saying. "He never had a taste, emotion or enjoyment, but what was sordid and foul."

Sir Pitt's brother, the Rector of the parish, is represented as being almost as abominable as himself, though in a different way—

"The Reverend Bute Crawley was a tall, stately, shovel-hatted man, far more popular in the county than the Baronet. At College he pulled stroke oar in the Christchurch boat, and had thrashed all the best bruisers of the 'town.' He carried his taste for boxing and athletic exercises into private life, there was not a fight within twenty miles at which he was not present, nor a race, nor a coursing match, nor a regatta, nor a ball, nor an election, nor a visitation dinner, nor indeed a good dinner in the whole county, but he found means to attend it. He had a fine voice, sung 'A Southerly Wind and a Cloudy Sky,' and gave the 'whoop' in chorus with general applause. He rode to hounds in a pepper and salt frock, and was one of the best fishermen in the county."

The following is a sample of the conversation he holds with his wife, who, we are told "wrote this worthy Divine's sermons"—

"Pitt can't be such an infernal villain as to sell the re-

version of the living, and that Methodist milksop of an eldest son looks to Parliament,' continued Mr. Crawley, after a pause.

"‘Sir Pitt will do anything,’ said the Rector’s wife, ‘we must get Miss Crawley to make him promise it, James.’

"‘Pitt will promise anything,’ replied the brother, ‘he promised he’d pay my college bills, when my father died; he promised he’d build the new wing to the Rectory. And it is to this man’s son—this scoundrel, gambler, swindler, murderer, of a Rawdon Crawley, that Matilda leaves the bulk of her money. I say it’s unchristian. By Jove it is. The infamous dog has got every vice except hypocrisy, and that belongs to his brother.’

"Hush, my dearest love! we’re in Sir Pitt’s grounds,’ interposed his wife.

"‘I say he has got every vice, Mrs. Crawley. Don’t bully me. Didn’t he shoot Captain Marker? Didn’t he rob young Lord Dovedale at the Cocoa Tree? Didn’t he cross the fight between Bill Soames and the Cheshire Trump by which I lost forty pound? You know he did; and as for women, why you heard that before me, in my own magistrates room—’

"‘For heaven’s sake, Mr. Crawley,’ said the lady, ‘spare me the details.’”

It was in a great measure to this severe sarcasm that Thackeray owed his popularity. He justly observes:—

“My rascals are no milk-and-water rascals, I promise you . . . such people there are living in the world, faithless, hopeless, charityless; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful too, mere quacks and fools; and it was to combat and expose such as those no doubt, that laughter was made.

But he does not always seem to attribute merriment to this humble and unpleasant origin; he produces some passages really meant for enjoyment, and doing justice to his gift, attacks frivolities and failings, which are not of an important kind. Thus, he speaks in a jocund strain of the vanity of “fashionable

fiddle-daddle and feeble court slip-slop," and exclaims, "Ah, ladies! Ask the Reverend Mr. Thurifer if Belgravia is not a sounding brass, and Tyburnia a tinkling cymbal!"

He tells us that "The affection of young ladies is of as rapid a growth as Jack's beanstalk, and reaches up to the sky in a night," and in the following passage he exhibits the conduct of an amiable and estimable girl, when under this fascinating spell—

"Were Miss Sedley's letters to Mr. Osborn to be published, we should have to extend this noxel to such a multiplicity of volumes, as not the most sentimental reader could support; she not only filled large sheets of paper, but crossed them with the most astonishing perverseness, she wrote whole pages out of poetry books without the least pity, the underlined words and passages with quite a frantic emphasis; and in fine gave the usual tokens of her condition. Her letters were full of repetition, she wrote rather doubtful grammar sometimes, and in her verses took all sorts of liberties with the metre."

Speaking of a very religious and medical lady—

"Pitt had been made to accept Saunders McNitre, Luke Waters, Giles Jowles, Podger's Pills, Rodger's Pills, Pokey's Elixir—every one of her ladyship's remedies, spiritual and temporal. He never left her house without carrying respectfully away with him piles of her quack theology and medicine. O, my dear brethren and fellow-sojourners in Vanity Fair, which among you does not know and suffer under such benevolent despots? It is in vain you say to them, 'Dear madam, I took Podger's specific at your orders last year, and believe in it. Why am I to recant, and accept the Rodger's articles now?' There is no help for it; the faithful proselytizer, if she cannot convince by argument, bursts into tears, and the recusant finds himself taking down the bolus, and saying 'Well, well, Rodger's be it.'"

A still more alarming attack is thus represented:—

"Glorvina had flirted with all the marriageable officers, whom the depôts of her country afforded, and all the bachelor squires who seemed eligible. She had been engaged to be married a half-score of times in Ireland, besides the clergyman at Bath, who had used her so ill. She had flirted all the way to Madras with the captain and chief-mate of the *Ramchunder East Indiaman*, and had a season at the Presidency. Everybody admired her; everybody danced with her; but no one proposed that was worth marrying. . . . Undismayed by forty or fifty previous defeats, Glorvina laid siege to Major Dobbin. She sang Irish melodies at him unceasingly. She asked him so frequently and so pathetically 'Will you come to the bower,' that it is a wonder how any man of feeling could have resisted the invitation. She was never tired of inquiring if 'Sorrow had his young days faded,' and was ready to listen and weep like *Desdemona* at the stories of his dangers and campaigns. She was constantly writing notes over to him at his house, borrowing his books, and scoring with her great pencil marks such passages of sentiment or humour, as awakened her sympathy. No wonder that public rumour assigned her to him."

In the following, Thackeray is more severe—

"His wife never cared about being called *Lady Newcome*. To manage the great house of *Hobson brothers and Newcome*, to attend to the interests of the enslaved negro: to awaken the benighted *Hottentot* to a sense of the truth; to convert Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Papists; to arouse the indifferent and often blasphemous mariner; to guide the washerwoman in the right way; to head all the public charities of her sect, and do a thousand secret kindnesses that none knew of; to answer myriads of letters, pension endless ministers, and supply their teeming wives with continuous baby-linen, to hear preachers daily bawling for hours, and listen untired on her knees, after a long day's labour, while florid rhapsodists belaboured cushions above her with wearisome benedictions; all these things had this woman to do, and for nearly fourscore years she fought her fight womanfully."

This pious lady's residence was a "serious Paradise;"

"As you entered at the gate gravity fell on you; and decorum wrapped you in a garment of starch. The butcher boy who galloped his horse and cart madly about the adjoining lanes and commons, whistled wild melodies (caught up in abominable play-house galleries) and joked with a

hundred cook-maids,—on passing that lodge fell into an undertaker's pace, and delivered his joints and sweetbreads silently at the servant's entrance. The rooks in the elms cawed sermons at morning and evening: the peacocks walked demurely on the terraces; and the guinea-fowls looked more quaker-like than those savoury birds usually do. The lodge-keeper was serious, and a clerk at a neighbouring chapel. The pastors who entered at that gate, and greeted his comely wife and children, fed the little lambkins with tracts. The head-gardener was a Scotch Calvinist, after the strictist order, only occupying himself with the melons and pines provisionally, and until the end of the world, which event, he could prove by infallible calculations was to come off in two or three years at farthest."

In one place, a collision is represented between the old and young schools of criticism:

"The Colonel heard opinions that amazed and bewildered him; he heard that Byron was no great poet, though a very clever man; he heard that there had been a wicked persecution against Mr. Pope's memory and fame, and that it was time to reinstate him; that his favourite, Dr. Johnson, talked admirably, but did not write English; that young Keats was a genius to be estimated in future days with young Raphael; and that a young gentleman of Cambridge, who had lately published two volumes of verses, might take rank with the greatest poets of all. Dr. Johnson not write English! Lord Byron not one of the greatest poets of the world! Sir Walter a poet of the second order! Mr. Pope attacked for inferiority and want of imagination; Mr. Keats, and this young Mr. Tennyson of Cambridge, the chiefs of modern poetic literature? What were these new dicta which Mr. Warrington delivered with a puff of tobacco smoke, to which Mr. Honeyman blandly assented, and Clive listened with pleasure? . . . With Newcome, the admiration for the literature of the last century was an article of belief, and the incredulity of the young men seemed rank blasphemy. 'You will be sneering at Shakespeare next,' he said, and was silenced, though not better pleased, when his youthful guests told him that Dr. Goldsmith sneered at him too; that Dr. Johnson did not understand him, and that Congreve in his own day, and afterwards, was considered to be, in some points, Shakespeare's superior."

In the next he relapses into his stronger sarcasm—

"There are no better satires than letters. Take a bundle of your dear friends' letters of ten years back—your dear friend, whom you hate now. Look at a file of your sister's ! how you clung to each other until you quarrelled about the twenty pound legacy. . . . Vows, love promises, confidence, gratitude ! how queerly they read after a while. . . . The best ink for Vanity Fair use would be one that faded utterly in a couple of days, and left the paper clean and blank, so that you might write on it to somebody else."

Again :—

"Many persons who let lodgings in Brighton have been servants themselves, are retired housekeepers, tradesfolk, and the like. With these surrounding individuals Hannah, treated on a footing of equality, bringing to her mistress accounts of their various goings on ; 'how No. 6 was let ; how No. 9 had not paid his rent again ; how the first floor at 27 had game almost every day, and made-dishes from Mutton's ; how the family who had taken Mrs. Bugsby's had left, as usual, after the very first night, the poor little infant blistered all over with bites on its dear little face ; how the Miss Leary's were going on shameful with the two young men, actually in their sitting-room, mum, where one of them offered Miss Laura Leary a cigar ; how Mrs. Cribb *still* went cuttin' pounds and pounds of meat off the lodgers' jints, emptying their tea-caddies, actually reading their letters. Sally had been told so by Polly, the Cribb's maid, who was kep', how that poor child was kep', hearing language perfectly hawful!'"

Thus in all Thackeray's descriptions there is more or less satire. He was always making pincushions, into which he was plunging his little points of sarcasm, and owing to his confining himself to this kind of humour he avoids the common danger of missing his mark. He is occasionally liberal of oaths and imprecations, and when any one of his characters is offended, he generally relieves his feelings by uttering "horrid curses." Barnes Newcome sends up "a perfect *feu d'artifice* of oaths." But he is entirely free from indelicacy, and



merely elegantly shadows forth the Eton form of punishment, as that "which none but a cherub can escape." In this respect he seems to have set before him the example of Mr. Honeyman, of whom he says he had "a thousand anecdotes, laughable riddles and droll stories (of the utmost correctness, you understand.)"

Perhaps one of his least successful attempts at humour is a collection of fables at the commencement of the *Newcomes* in which we have conversations between a fox, an owl, a wolf in sheep's clothing, and a donkey in a lion's skin, and such incongruities as would have shocked Aristophanes. His Christmas books depend mostly on the broad caricatures with which they are embellished, and upon a large supply of rough joking.

Thackeray wrote a work named the "*English Humorists*," but he omits in it all mention of the humour by which his authors were immortalized. Certainly the ordinary habits and little foibles of great men are more entertaining to the general public than inquiries into the nature of their talent, which would only interest those fond of study and investigation.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Dickens—Sympathy with the Poor—Vulgarity—Geniality  
 —Mrs. Gamp—Mixture of Pathos and Humour—Lever  
 and Dickens compared—Dickens' power of Description  
 —General Remarks.

WE shall be paying Hood no undue compliment if we couple his name with that of Dickens as betokening the approach of milder and gentler sentiments. They were themselves the chief pioneers of the better way. Hitherto the poor and uneducated had been regarded with a certain amount of contempt; their language and stupidity had formed fertile subjects for the coarse ridicule of the humorist. But now a change was in progress; broader views were gaining ground, and a time was coming when men, notwithstanding the accidents of birth and fortune, should feel mutual sympathy, and

“brothers be for a’ that.”

With Dickens the poor man was not a mere clown or blockhead; but beneath his “hodden gray” often carried good feeling, intelligence,

and wit. He was rather humorous than ludicrous, and had some dignity of character. Since his time, consideration for the poor has greatly increased; we see it in the large charitable gifts, which are always increasing—in the interest taken in schools and hospitals. Probably the respectable and quiet character of the labouring classes has contributed to raise them in the estimation of the richer part of the community.

A large portion of English humour is now employed upon so-called vulgarity. The modification of feeling with regard to the humbler classes has caused changes in the signification of this word. Originally derived from “vulgus,” the crowd, it meant that roughness of language and manner which is found among the less educated. It did not properly imply anything culpable, but had a bad sense given it by those who considered “gentlemanly” to imply some moral superiority. The worship of wealth so caused the signification of this latter word to exceed its original reference to high birth, that we now hear people say that there are real gentlemen among the poorer classes; and, conversely, we at times speak of the vulgarity of the rich, as of their pride, impertinence, or affectation—just as Fielding used the word “mob” to signify contemptible people of any class. It is evident

that some moral superiority or deficiency is thus implied. There may be, on the whole, some foundation for such distinctions, but they are not so much recognised as they were, scarcely at all in the cases of individuals, and the provincial accents and false grammar of the poor are more amusing than formerly, because we take a kindlier interest in that class.

M. Taine does not seem to have exercised his usual penetration when he says that English humour "far from agreeable, and bitter in taste, like their own beverages, abounds in Dickens. French sprightliness, joy, and gaiety is a kind of good wine only grown in the lands of the sun. In its insular state it leaves an aftertaste of vinegar. The man who jests here is seldom kindly and never happy; he feels and censures the inequalities of life." On the contrary, we are inclined to think that French humour is fully as severe as English—they have such sayings as that "a man without money is a body without blood," and their great wits were not generally free from bitterness.

There is little that is personal or offensive in Dickens. It is said that he was threatened with a prosecution for producing the character of Squeers, but in general his puppets are too artificial to excite any personal resentment.

There are evidently set up merely to be knocked down. Few would identify themselves with *Heap* or *Scrooge*, and although the moral taught is appreciated by all, no class is hit, but only men who seem to be pre-eminent in churlishness or villainy. Dickens is remarkable for his gentleness whenever his humour touches the poor, and while he makes amusement out of their simplicity and ignorance, he throws in some sterling qualities. They often form the principal characters in his books, and there is nearly always in them something good-natured and sympathetic. *Sam Weller* is a pleasant fellow, so is *Boots* at the *Holly Tree Inn*. *Mrs. Jarley*, who travels about to fairs with wax-works, is a kindly and hospitable old party. She asks *Nell* and her grandfather to take some refreshment—

“The grandfather humbly pulled off his hat and thanked her. The lady of the caravan then bade him come up the stairs, but the drum proving an inconvenient table for two, they descended again and sat upon the grass, where she handed down to them the tea-tray, the bread and butter, the knuckle of ham, and in short everything of which she had partaken herself, except the bottle which she had already embraced an opportunity of slipping into her pocket.

“‘Set ’em out near the hind wheels, child, that’s the best place,’ said their friend superintending the arrangements from above. ‘Now hand up the tea-pot for a little more hot water, and a pinch of fresh tea, and then both of you eat and drink as much as you can, and don’t spare anything; that’s all I ask you.’

“While they were thus engaged the lady of the caravan alighted on the earth, and with her hands clasped behind her, and her large bonnet trembling excessively, walked

up and down in a measured tread and very stately manner suveying the caravan from time to time with an air of calm delight and deriving particular gratification from the red panels and brass knocker. When she had taken this gentle exercise for some time, she sat down upon the steps and called 'George,' whereupon a man in a carter's frock, who had been so shrouded in a hedge up to this time as to see everything that passed without being seen himself, parted the twigs that concealed him and appeared in a sitting attitude supporting on his legs a baking dish, and a half gallon stone bottle, and bearing in his right hand a knife, and in his left a fork.

"'Yes, missus,' said George.

"'How did you find the cold pie, George?'

"'It worn't amiss, mum.'

"'And the beer?' said the lady of the caravan with an appearance of being more interested in this question than the last, 'is it passable, George?'

"'It's more flatterer than it might be,' George returned, 'but it a'nt so bad for all that.'

"To set the mind of his mistress at rest, he took a sip (amounting in quantity to a pint or thereabouts) from the stone bottle, and then smacked his lips, winked his eye, and nodded his head. No doubt with the same amiable desire he immediately resumed his knife and fork as a practical assurance that the beer had wrought no bad effect upon his appetite.

"The lady of the caravan looked on approvingly for some time and then said,

"'Have you nearly finished?'

"'Wery nigh, mum,' and indeed after scraping the dish all round with his knife and carrying the choice brown morsels to his mouth, and after taking such a scientific pull at the stone bottle that, by degrees almost imperceptible to the sight, his head went farther and farther back until he lay nearly at his full length upon the ground, this gentleman declared himself quite disengaged, and came forth from his retreat.

"'I hope I haven't hurried you, George,' said his mistress, who appeared to have a great sympathy with his late pursuit.

"'If you have,' returned the fellow, wisely reserving himself for any favourable contingency, 'we must make it up next time, that's all.'

Mrs. Gamp has a touch of sympathy in her exuberance. Contemplating going down to

the country with the Dickens' company of actors, she tells us—

“Which Mrs. Harris's own words to me was these, ‘Sairey Gamp,’ she says, ‘why not go to Margate? ‘Srimps,’ says that dear creetur, ‘is to your liking. Sairey, why not go to Margate for a week, bring your constitution up with srimps, and come back to them loving arts as knows and wallies you, blooming?’ ‘Sairey,’ Mrs. Harris says, ‘you are but poorly. Don’t denige it, Mrs. Gamp, for books is in your looks. You must have rest. Your mind,’ she says, ‘is too strong for you; it gets you down and treads upon you, Sairey. It is useless to disguise the fact—the blade is a wearing out the sheets.’ ‘Mrs. Harris,’ I says to her, ‘I could not undertake to say, and I will not deceive you ma’am, that I am not the woman I could wish to be. The time of worrit as I had with Mrs. Colliber, the baker’s lady, which was so bad in her mind with her first, that she would not so much as look at bottled stout, and kept to gruel through the month, has agued me, Mrs. Harris. But, ma’am,’ I says to her, ‘talk not of Margate, for if I do go anywhere it is elsewheres, and not there.’ ‘Sairey,’ says Mrs. Harris solemn, “whence this mystery? If I have ever deceived the hardest-working, soberest, and best of women, mention it.’ . . . ‘Mrs. Harris, then,’ I says, ‘I have heard as there is an expedition going down to Manjester and Liverpool a play-acting, If I goes anywhere for change it is along with that.’ Mrs. Harris clasps her hands, and drops into a chair, ‘And have I lived to hear,’ she says, ‘of Sairey Gamp, as always kept herself respectable, in company with playactors.’ “Mrs. Harris,’ I says to her, ‘be not alarmed, not reg’lar play-actors—hammertoores.’ ‘Thank Evans!’ says Mrs. Harris, and bustizes into a flood of tears,”

Dickens saw with Hood the power to be obtained by uniting pathos with humour. Such an intermixture at first appears inharmonious, but in reality produces sweet music. There is something corresponding to the course of external nature with its light and shade its sunshine and showers, in this melancholy chased away by mirth, and joy merging into

sadness. Here, Dickens has held up the mirror, and shown a bright reflection of the outer world. Out of many choice specimens, we may select the following from the speech of the Cheap Jack—

“‘Now, you country boobies,’ says I, feeling as if my heart was a heavy weight at the end of a broken sash-line, ‘I give you notice that I am going to charm the money out of your pockets, and to give you so much more than your money’s worth that you’ll only persuade yourselves to draw your Saturday-night’s wages ever again arterwards, by the hopes of meeting me to lay ’em out with, which you never will; and why not? Because I’ve made my fortune by selling my goods on a large scale for seventy-five per cent less than I give for them, and I am consequently to be elevated to the House of Peers next week by the title of the Duke of Cheap, and Markis Jack-a-looral.

He puts up a lot and after recommending it with all his eloquence pretends to knock it down—

“As there had been no bid at all, everybody looked about and grinned at everybody, while I touched little Sophy’s face (he was holding her in his arms) and asked her if she felt faint or giddy. ‘Not very, father; it will soon be over.’ Then turning from the pretty patient eyes, which were opened now, and seeing nothing but grins across my lighted greasepot. I went on again in my cheap Jack style. ‘Where’s the butcher?’ (my mournful eye had just caught sight of a fat young butcher on the outside of the crowd) ‘She says the good luck is the butcher’s, where is he?’ Everybody handed over the blushing butcher to the front, and there was a roar, and the butcher felt himself obliged to put his hand in his pocket and take the lot. The party so picked out in general does feel obliged to take the lot—good four times out of six. Then we had another lot the counterpart of that one and sold it sixpence cheaper, which is always very much enjoyed. Then we had the spectacles. It ain’t a special profitable lot, but I put ’em on, and I see what the Chancellor of the Exchequer is going to take off the taxes, and I see what the sweetheart of the young woman in the shawl is doing at home, and I see what the Bishops has got for



dinner, and a deal more that seldom fails to fetch up their spirits, and the better their spirits the better they bids. Then we had the ladies' lot—the tea-pots, tea-caddy, glass sugar-basin, half-a-dozen spoons, and caudle cup—and all the time I was making similar excuses to give a look or two, and say a word or two to my poor child. It was while the second ladies' lot was holding 'em enchained that I felt her lift herself a little on my shoulder to look across the dark street. 'What troubles you darling?' 'Nothing troubles me, father, I am not at all troubled. But don't I see a pretty churchyard over there?' 'Yes, my dear.' 'Kiss me twice, dear father, and lay me down to rest upon that churchyard grass, so soft and green.' I staggered back into the cart with her head dropped on my shoulder, and I says to her mother, 'Quick, shut the door! Don't let those laughing people see.' 'What's the matter?' she cries, 'O woman, woman,' I tells her, 'you'll never catch my little Sophy by her hair again, for she has flown away from you.'"

Dickens' strongest characters, and those he loved most to paint, are such as contain foibles and eccentricities, or much dulness and ignorance in conjunction with the best feelings and intentions, so that his teaching seems rather to be that we should look beyond mere external trifles. Those he attacks are mostly middle-class people, or those slightly below them—the dogs in office, and the dogs in the manger. The artifice and cunning of the waiter of the Hotel at Yarmouth, where little Copperfield awaits the coach, is excellently represented.

"The waiter brought me some chops and vegetables, and took the covers off in such a bouncing manner, that I was afraid I must have given him some offence. But he greatly relieved my mind by putting a chair for me at the table, and saying very affably 'Now sixfoot come on!'

"I thanked him and took my seat at the board; but found it extremely difficult to handle my knife and fork with anything like dexterity, or to avoid splashing myself with the gravy, while he was standing opposite, staring so

hard, and making me blush in the most dreadful manner every time I caught his eye. After watching me into the second chop, he said :

"There's half a pint of ale for you, will you have it now?"

"I thanked him and said 'Yes'—upon which he poured it out of a jug into a large tumbler, and held it up against the light and made it look beautiful.

"My eye!" he said "It seems a good deal, don't it."

"It does seem a good deal," I answered with a smile, for it was quite delightful to me to find him so pleasant. He was a twinkling-eyed, purple-faced man, with his hair standing upright all over his head; and as he stood with one arm akimbo, holding up the glass to the light, with one hand he looked quite friendly.

"There was a gentleman here yesterday," he said, "a stout gentleman by the name of Topsawyer, perhaps you know him?"

"No," I said, "I don't think—"

"In breeches and gaiters, broad-brimmed hat, grey coat, speckled choker," said the waiter.

"No," I said bashfully, "I hav'n't the pleasure—"

"He came here," said the waiter, looking at the light through the tumbler, "ordered a glass of this ale, *would* order it, I told him not—drank it, and fell dead. It was too old for him. It oughtn't to be drawn, that's the fact."

"I was very much shocked to hear of this melancholy accident, and said I thought I had better have some water. 'Why, you see,' said the waiter, looking at the light through the tumbler with one of his eyes shut, 'our people don't like things being ordered and left. It offends them. But I'll drink it, if you like. I'm used to it, and use is everything. I don't think it will hurt me if I throw my head back and take it off quick; shall I?'"

"I replied that he would much oblige me by drinking it, if he thought he could do it safely, but by no means otherwise. When he did throw his head back and take it off quick, I had a horrible fear, I confess, of seeing him meet the fate of the lamented Topsawyer, and fall lifeless on the carpet. But it did not hurt him. On the contrary. I thought he seemed the fresher for it. 'What have we got here?' he said, putting a fork into my dish. 'Not chops?'"

"Chops," I said.

"Lord bless my soul," he exclaimed, "I didn't know they were chops. Why, a chop's the very thing to take off the bad effect of that beer. Ain't it lucky?"

"So he took a chop by the bone in one hand and a potato in the other, and ate away with a very good appetite to my

extreme satisfaction. He afterwards took another chop and another potato, and after that another chop and another potato. When we had done he brought me a pudding, and having set it before me seemed to ruminate, and to be absent in his mind for some moments.

“‘How’s the pie?’ he said, rousing himself.

“‘It’s a pudding,’ I made answer.

“‘Pudding,’ he exclaimed, ‘why, bless me, so it is. What?’ looking nearer at it, ‘you don’t mean to say it’s a batter pudding!’

“‘Yes, it is indeed.’

“‘Why, a batter pudding,’ he said, taking up a tablespoon, ‘is my favourite pudding! Aint it lucky? Come on, pitch in, and let’s see who’ll get most.’

“‘The waiter certainly got most. He entreated me more than once to come in and win, but what with his tablespoon to my teaspoon, his dispatch to my dispatch, and his appetite to my appetite I was left far behind at the first mouthful, and had no chance with him.’”

We are all sufficiently familiar with the vast amount and variety of humour with which Dickens enriched his writings. It is not aphoristic, but flows along in a light sparkling stream. This is what we should expect from a man who wrote so much and so rapidly. His thoughts did not concentrate and crystallize into a few sharply cut expressions, and he has left us scarcely any sayings which will live as “household words.” Moreover, in his bold style of writing he sought to produce effects by broad strokes and dashes—not afraid of an excess of caricature, from which he left his readers to deduct the discount. Taine says he was “too mad.” But he was daring, and cared little for the risk of being ludicrous, providing he escaped the certainty of being dull. He was

not afraid of improbabilities, any more than his contemporary Lever was, and owing to this they both now seem somewhat old-fashioned. Lever here exceeded Dickens, and his course was different; his plan was to sow a few seeds of extravagant falsehood, whence he would raise a wonderful efflorescence of ludicrous circumstances. For instance, he makes a General Count de Vanderdelft pay a visit to the Dodd family, and bring them an invitation from the King of Belgium. Great preparations are of course made by the ladies for so grand an occasion. The day arrives, and they have to travel in their full dress in second and third class carriages. They arrive a little late, but make their way to the Royal Pavilion. Here, while in great suspense, they meet the General, who says he was afraid he should have missed them.

“‘We’ve not a minute to lose,’ cried he, drawing Mary Ann’s arm within his own. ‘If Leopold sits down to table, I can’t present you.’

“The General made his way through the crowd until he reached a barrier, where two men were standing taking tickets. He demanded admission, and on being refused, exclaimed, ‘These scullions don’t know me—this canaille never heard my name.’ With these words the General kicked up the bar with his foot, and passed in with Mary Ann, flourishing his drawn sword in the air, and crying out, ‘Take them in flank—sabre them—every man—no prisoners—no quarter.’ At this juncture two big men in grey coats burst through the crowd and laid hands on the General, who, it seems, had escaped a week before from a mad-house in Ghent.”

The basis of all this is far too improbable,

but there was a temptation to construct a very good story upon it.

But Dickens builds upon much firmer ground, and is only fantastic in the superstructure. This is certainly an improvement, and we admire his genius most when he controls its flight, and when his caricatures are less grotesque. I take the following from "Nicholas Nickleby," Chapter II.

"Although a few members of the graver professions live about Golden Square, it is not exactly in anybody's way to or from anywhere. . . . It is a great resort of foreigners. The dark complexioned men, who wear large rings, and heavy watchguards, and bushy whiskers, and who congregate under the opera colonnade, and about the box-office in the season, between four and five in the afternoon, when they give orders—all live in Golden Square, or within a street of it. Two or three violins and a wind instrument from the opera band reside within its precincts. Its boarding-houses are musical, and the notes of pianos and harps float in the evening-time round the head of the mournful statue, the guardian genius of a little wilderness of shrubs, in the centre of the Square. . . . Street bands are on their mettle in Golden Square; and itinerant glee-singers quaver involuntarily as they raise their voices within its boundaries. . . .

"Some London houses have a melancholy little plot of ground behind them, usually fenced in by four white-washed walls, and frowned upon by stacks of chimneys, in which there withers on from year to year a crippled tree, that makes a show of putting forth a few leaves late in Autumn, when other trees shed theirs, and drooping in the effort, lingers on all crackled and smoke-dried till the following season, when it repeats the same process; and perhaps, if the weather be particularly genial, even tempts some rheumatic sparrow to chirp in its branches."

In the next chapter there is a description of the house of a humble votary of the arts.

"A miniature painter lived there, for there was a large

gilt frame screwed upon the street-door, in which were displayed, upon a black velvet ground, two portraits of naval dress, coats with faces looking out of them, and telescopes attached; one of a young gentleman in a very vermillion uniform flourishing a sabre; and one of a literary character with a high forehead, a pen and ink, six books, and a curtain. There was, moreover, a touching representation of a young lady reading a manuscript in an unfathomable forest, and a charming whole length of a large-headed little boy, sitting on a stool with his legs foreshortened to the size of salt-spoons. Besides these works of art, there were a great many heads of old ladies and gentlemen smirking at each other out of blue and brown skies, and an elegantly written card of terms with an embossed border."

When Mr. Crummles, the stage-manager, urges his old pony along the road, the following conversation takes place:—

"‘He’s a good pony at bottom,’ said Mr. Crummles, turning to Nicholas. He might have been at bottom, but he certainly was not at top, seeing that his coat was of the roughest, and most ill-favoured kind. So Nicholas merely observed that he shouldn’t wonder if he was. ‘Many and many is the circuit this pony has gone,’ said Mr. Crummles, flicking him skilfully on the eyelid, for old acquaintance sake. ‘He is quite one of us. His mother was on the stage.’

"‘Was she?’ rejoined Nicholas.

"‘She ate apple-pie at circus for upwards of fourteen years,’ said the Manager, ‘fired pistols, and went to bed in a night-cap; and in short, took the low comedy entirely. His father was an actor.’

"‘Was he at all distinguished?’

"‘Not very,’ said the Manager. ‘He was rather a low sort of pony. The fact is, he had been originally jobbed out by the day, and he never quite got over his old habits. He was clever in melodrama, too, but too broad, too broad. When the mother died he took the port wine business.’

"‘The port wine business?’ cried Nicholas.

"‘Drinking port wine with the clown,’ said the Manager; ‘but he was greedy and one night bit off the bowl of the glass and choked himself, so his vulgarity was the death of him at last.’”

It is greatly to the credit of Dickens that

although he wrote so much and salted so freely, he never approached any kind of impropriety. The only weak point in his humour is that he borrows too much from his imagination, and too little from reality.

I trust that those who have accompanied me through the chapters of this work, will have been able to trace a gradual amelioration in humour. We have seen it from age to age running parallel with the history, and varying with the mental development of the times, rising and falling in fables, demonology, word-coining and coarseness, and I hope we may add in practical joking and coxcombry.

The remaining chapters will draw conclusions from our general survey. There can be little doubt that humour cannot be studied in any country better than in our own. The commercial character of England, and its connection with many nations whose feelings are intermingled in our minds as their blood is in our veins, are favourable for the development of fancy and of the finest kinds of wit, while the moderate Government under which we live, tends in the same direction. Humour may have germinated in the darkness of despotism, among the discontented subjects of Dionysius or under "the tyranny tempered by epigrams," of Louis XIV., but it failed, under

such conditions to obtain a full expression, and although it has revelled and run riot under republican governments, it has always tended in them to coarse and personal vituperation. The fairest blossoms of pleasantry thrive best where the sun is not strong enough to scorch, nor the soil rank enough to corrupt.



## CHAPTER XIX.

Variation—Constancy—Influence of Temperament—Of Observation—Bulls—Want of Knowledge—Effects of Emotion—Unity of the Sense of the Ludicrous.

AS every face in the world is different, so no two minds are exactly similar, although there is great uniformity in the perceptions of the senses and still more in our primary innate ideas. The variety lies in the one case, in the finer lines and expressions of the countenance, and in the other in those delicate shades and combinations of feeling which are influenced more or less by memory, reflection, imagination, by experience, education and temperament, by taste, morality, and religion.

It was no doubt the view of this great diversity of thought that led Quintilian to say that "the topics from which jests may be elicited are not less numerous than those from which thoughts may be derived!" Herbert writes to the same purpose—

“All things are full of jest; nothing that’s plain  
But may be witty, if thou hast the vein.”

But we are not in the vein except sometimes, and under peculiar circumstances, so that, practically, few sayings are humorous.

It is more difficult to assert that there are any jests which would be appreciated by all. The statement that “some phases of life must stir humour in any man of sanity,” is probably too wide. There is little of this universality in the ludicrous, but we shall have some reason for thinking that there is a certain constancy in the mental feeling which awakens it. It is also fixed with regard to each individual. If we had sufficient knowledge, we could predict exactly whether a man would be amused at a certain story, and we sometimes say “Tell that to Mr. —— it will amuse him.” But if his nature were not so disposed, no exertions on his part or ours could make him enjoy it. The ludicrous is dependent upon feelings or circumstances, but not upon the will. It is peculiarly involuntary as those know who have tried to smother a laugh. The utmost advance we can make towards making ourselves mirthful is by changing our circumstances. It is said that if a man were to look at people dancing with his ears stopped, the figures moving without accompaniment would seem ludicrous to him, but his merriment would not be great because he

would know the strangeness he observed was not real but caused by his own intentional act. We may say that for a thing to appear ludicrous to a man which does not seem so at present, he must change the character of his mind.

There is another kind of constancy which should here be noticed. Some humorous sayings survive for long periods, and occasionally are adopted in foreign countries. In some cases they have immortalized a name, in others we know not who originated them, or to whom they first referred. They seem to be the production, as they are the heritage, not of man but of humanity. It is essential to the permanence of humour that it should refer to large classes, and awaken emotions common to many. If Socrates and Xantippe, the philosopher and the shrew, had not represented classes, and an ordinary connection in life, we should have been little amused at their differences.\*

Having mentioned these few first aspects in which humour is constant, we now come to the wider field of its variation. It may be said to vary with the age, with the century, with classes of society, with the time of life, nay, it has been asserted, with the very hours

\* The saying "He that fights and runs away, shall live to fight another day," is as old as the days of Menander.

of the day! The simplest mode in which we can demonstrate this character of humour is to consider some of those things which although amusing to others are not so to us, and those which amuse us, but not others; we sometimes regard as ludicrous what is intended to be humorous, sometimes on the other hand we view as humorous what is seriously meant, and sometimes we take gravely what is intended to be amusing.

A man may make what he thinks to be a jest, and be neither humorous nor ludicrous, and a man may cause others to laugh without being one or the other; for what he says may be amusing, although he does not intend it to be so, or he may be merely relating some actual occurrence. Occasionally, there is some doubt as to whether we regard things as ludicrous or humorous. This is seen in some proverbs.

But the most common and strongly marked instances of variation are where what is seriously taken by one person is regarded as ludicrous by another. Thus the conception of the qualities desirable in public speaking are very different on this side to the Atlantic from what they are on the other, and what appears to us to partake of the ludicrous, seems to them to be only grand, effective, and appropriate. "In patriotic eloquence," says a U.S. journal, "our American stump-speakers beat the world.

They don't stand up and prose away so as to put an audience to sleep, after the lazy genteel aristocratic style of British Parliamentary speech-making." This boast is certainly just. There is a vigour about the popular style of American oratory that we are sure has never been equalled in the British Parliament. A paper of the interior in paying a glowing tribute to the eloquence of the Fourth of July orator who officiated in the town where the journal is published, says—"Although he had a platform ten feet square to orate upon, he got so fired up with patriotism that it wasn't half big enough to hold him: his fist collided three times with the President of the day, besides bungling the eye of the reader of the Declaration, and every person on the stage left it limping." Such a style of oratory would leave durable impressions, and be felt as well as heard.

It cannot be doubted that our mental state, whether temporary or habitual, exercises a great influence over us in regard to humour. Temperament must modify all our emotional feelings, some are naturally gay and hilarious, some grave and austere, children laugh from little more than exuberance of spirits, and joyousness causes us to seek pleasure, to notice ludicrous combinations which would otherwise escape us,

and renders us sensitive of all humorous impressions. But the cares of life have generally the effect of making men grave even where there is no lack of imagination. Some have been so serious in mood that it has been recorded that they were never known to laugh, as it is said of Philip the Third of Spain that he only did so once—on reading Don Quixote.

How little attempt at humour is there in most of our literary works! True, humour is rather the language of conversation, and we may expect it as little in writing, as we do sentiment in society. But even in its own special province it is lacking, there is generally in our festive gatherings more of what is dull than of what is playful and pleasant. Perhaps our cloudy skies may have some influence—it is impossible to doubt that climate affects the mental disposition of nations. The natives of Tahiti in their soft southern isle are gay and laughter-loving; the Arab of the desert is fierce and warlike, and seldom condescends to smile. Sydney Smith said “it would require a surgical operation to get a joke into the understanding of a Scotchman;” but the Irishman in his mild variable climate is ready to be witty under all circumstances. Flögel, writing in Germany, observes that “humour is not a fruit to be gathered from every

bough; you can find a hundred men able to draw tears for every one that can raise a laugh."

There is also a great difference between individuals in this respect. Some are naturally bright and jocund, and others are misanthropic and manufacture out of very trite materials a sort of snap-dragon wit, which flares up in an instant, is as soon out, and generally burns somebody's fingers. It may be urged on the contrary that many celebrated wits as Mathews, Leech, and others, have been melancholy men. But despondency is often found in an excitable temperament which is not unfavourable to humour, for the man who is unduly depressed at one moment is likely to be immoderately elated at another. Old Hobbes was of opinion that laughter arose from pride, upon which Addison remarked that according to that theory, if we heard a man laugh, instead of saying that he was very merry, we should say that he was very proud. We have already observed that some men are disinclined to laugh because they are of an earnest turn of mind, constantly pondering upon their affairs and the possibility of transforming a shilling into a pound. Such are those to whom Carlyle referred when he said that "the man who cannot laugh is only fit for

treasons, stratagems and spoils." But there are a few persons who follow Lord Chesterfield in systematically suppressing this kind of demonstration. They think it derogatory, and in them pride is antagonistic to humour. A man who is free and easy and talkative, gains in one direction what he loses in another. We love him as a frank, genial fellow, but can never regard him with any great reverence. Laughter seems to bespeak a simple docile nature, such as those who assume to rule the world are not willing to have the credit of possessing. It belongs more to the fool than to the rogue, to those who follow than to those who lead. Eminent men do not intentionally avoid laughter; they are not inclined to it; and there are some, who, from being generally of a profound and calculating turn of mind are not given to any exhibition of emotion. It has been said that Diogenes never laughed, and the same has been asserted of Swift. And although we may safely conclude that these statements were not literally true, there was probably some foundation for them. No doubt they appreciated humour, but their minds were earnest and ambitious. Moreover, great wits are accustomed to the character of their own humour, and are often



merely repeating what they have heard or said frequently.

Nature has endowed few men with two gifts, and emotional joyousness and high intellectual culture form a rare combination, such as was found in Goldsmith with his hearty laughter, and in Macaulay, who tells us that he laughed at Mathews' comic performance "until his sides were sore." Bishop Warburton said that humorists were generally men of learning, but although those who were so would have been most prominent, we scarcely find the name of one of them in the course of these volumes ; many of those mentioned sprang from the humbler paths of life, but all were men of study. Still those who are altogether unable to enjoy a joke are men of imperfect sympathies.

Charles Lamb observes that in a certain way the character, even of a ludicrous man, is attractive—"The more laughable blunders a man shall commit in your company, the more tests he gives you that he will not betray or over-reach you. And take my word for this, reader, and say a fool told it you, if you please, that he who hath not a dram of folly in his mixture, hath pounds of much worse matter in his composition. What are commonly the world's received fools, but such whereof the world is not worthy?"

We have intimated that our sense of the ludicrous varies in accordance with memory, imagination, observation, and association. The minds of some are so versatile, and so richly endowed with intellectual gifts, that their ideas sparkle and coruscate, they splinter every ray of light into a thousand colours, and produce all kinds of strange juxtapositions and combinations. (This exuberance has probably led to the seemingly contradictory saying that men of sentiment are generally men of humour.) No doubt their sallies would be poor and appreciated by themselves alone were they without a certain foundation, but a vast number of things are capable of affording amusement. Pleasantries often turn upon something much more difficult to define than to feel—upon some nicety of regard, or neatness of proportion. No interchange of ideas can take place without much beyond the letter being understood, and very much depends upon variety of delicate significations. Words are as variable and relative as thought, differing with time and place—a few constantly dropping out of use, some understood in one age, but conveying no distinct idea in another, and not calling up exactly the same associations in different individuals. We cannot, therefore, agree with Addison that translation may be considered a

sure test for distinguishing between genuine and spurious humour—although it would detect mere puns. Voltaire says of *Hudibras*, “I have never met with so much wit in one book as in this—who would believe that a work which paints in such lively and natural colours the several foibles and frolics of mankind, and where we meet with more sentiment than words, should baffle the endeavours of the ablest translator?” But any alteration of words would generally destroy humour. “To go to the crows,” was a good and witty expression in ancient Greece, but it does not signify anything to us, except, perhaps, climbing trees. When *we* wish a man to be devoured, we tell him to “go to the dogs.” Even the flow and sound of words sometimes has great influence in humour.

Association has also considerable effect. Owing to this little boys at school are rarely able to laugh at a Greek joke. We consider that to call a man an ass is a reproach, but in the East in bewailing a lost friend they frequently exclaim, “Alas, my jackass!” for they do not associate the animal with stupidity, but with patience and usefulness. These differences show that the essence of some humour is so fugitive that the smallest change will destroy it. We may well suppose, therefore, that it escapes many

who have not quick perceptions, while we find that everyone more keenly appreciates that which relates to some subject with which he is specially conversant—a lawyer enjoys a legal, a broker a commercial joke. Hence women, taking more interest than men in the general concerns of life and in a great variety of things, are more given to mirth—their mind reflects the world, that of men only one line in it. We see in society how much more quickly some persons understand an obscure allusion than others—some from natural penetration, some from familiarity with the subject. There are those who cannot enjoy any joke which they do not make themselves. Some cannot guess the simplest riddle, while others could soon detect the real nature of a cherry coloured cat with rose-coloured feet.

Observation is necessary for all criticism, especially of that kind often found in humour. As an instance of humour being unappreciated for lack of it, I may mention that Beattie considers the well known passage of Gray to be parodied poetically, but not humorously, in the following lines upon a country curate—

“Bread was his only food; his drink the brook;  
So small a salary did his rector send,  
He left his laundress all he had—a book,  
He found in death, ’twas all he wished—a friend.”

Most people would think that this was in-

tended to be humorous. It struck me so—the “book” was evidently his washing book—and on turning to the original poem I found that the other stanzas were not at all of a serious complexion. The assistance given by imagination to humour is clearly seen, when after some good saying laughter recurs several times, as new aspects of the situation suggested present themselves.

Circumstances of time and country greatly modify our modes of thought, and a vast amount of humour has thus become obscure, not only for want of information, but because things are not viewed in the same light. Beattie observes that Shakespeare’s humour will never be adequately relished in France nor Molière’s in England.\*

The inquiry in the present chapter is not as to what creates the ludicrous, but as to what tends to vivify or obscure it. We shall not here attempt any surmises as to its essential nature, although we trace the conditions necessary to its due appreciation. A great number of things pass unnoticed every day both in circumstances and conversation, in which the ludicrous might be detected by a keen observer. The following is not a bad instance of an

\* Beattie was unfortunate in selecting Molière for his comparison, for his humour is especially that of situation and can be tolerably well understood by a foreigner.

absurd statement being unconsciously made—

“One day when walking in the Black Country the Bishop of Lichfield saw a number of miners seated on the ground, and went to speak to them. On asking them what they were doing, he was told they had been ‘loynin.’ The Bishop, much dismayed, asked for an explanation. ‘Why, you see,’ said one of the men, ‘one of us fun’ a kettle, and we have been trying who can tell the biggest lie to ha’ it.’ His lordship, being greatly shocked, began to lecture them and to tell them that lying was a great offence, and that he had always felt this so strongly that he had never told a lie in the whole course of his life. He had scarcely finished, when one of the hearers exclaimed, ‘Gie the governor the kettle; gie the governor the kettle!’”

Under the head of unconscious absurdities may be classed what are commonly called “bulls,” implying like the French “*bêtise*” so great a deficiency of observation as to approach a kind of brutish stupidity only worthy of the lower animals. A man could not be charged with such obtuseness if he were only ignorant of some philosophical truth, or even of a fact commonly known, or if his mistake were clearly from inadvertence. I have heard the question asked “Which is it more correct to say. Seven and five *is* eleven, or seven and five *are* eleven?” and if a man reply hastily “*Are* is the more correct,” he could not be charged with having made a “bull,” any more than if a boy had made a mistake in a sum of addition or subtraction. If a foreigner says “I have got to-morrow’s Times,” we do not consider it a bull because he is ignorant that he should have said “yesterday’s,” and a person who

does not understand Latin may be excused for saying "Under existing circumstances," perhaps long usage justifies the expression. For this reason, and also because no dulness is implied, we may safely say "the sun sets," or "the sun has gone in." To constitute a bull, there must be something glaringly self-contradictory in the statement. But every observation containing a contradiction does not show dulness of apprehension, but often talent and ingenuity. Poetry and humour are much indebted to such expressions—thus the old Greek writers often call offerings made to the dead "a kindness which is no kindness," and Horace speaks of "discordant harmony" and "active idleness." Some other contradictions are humorous, and most bulls would be so were they made purposely.\* A genuine bull is never intentional. But few people would plead guilty to having shown bovine stupidity. They would shelter themselves under some of the various exceptions—perhaps explain that they attach a different meaning to the words, and that so the expressions are not so very incorrect, and all that could generally be proved against a man would be that he had used words in unaccustomed senses. Thus what appears to one person to be a "bull" seems a correct expression to another.

\* Thus we speak of "fried ice" or "ice with the chill off."

I remember an Irishman telling me that in his country they had the finest climate in the world, and on my replying "Yes, I believe you have very little frost or snow," he rejoined "Oh, plinty, sir, plinty of frost and snow—but frost and snow is not cold in Ireland." He was quite serious—intended no joke. He evidently used the term "cold," not only in reference to temperature, but also to the amount of discomfort usually suffered from it. And that it may sometimes be used in a metaphorical sense is evident from our expressions "a cold heart," "a freezing manner."

Sometimes people would attribute their mistake to inadvertence, and so escape from the charge of stupidity implied in a "bull." A friend who told me that a Mr. Carter was "a seller of everything, and other things besides," would probably have urged this excuse. The writer of the following in the "agony" column of a daily paper, "Dear Tom. Come immediately if you see this. If not come on Saturday," would contend that there was only a slight omission, and that the meaning was evidently "if you see this *to-day*." From inadvertence I have heard it said in commendation of a celebrated artist, that "he painted dead game—to the life." Sir Boyle Roche is said to have exclaimed in a



fit of enthusiasm "that Admiral Howe would sweep the French fleet off the face of the earth."

But it may be urged that there are some observations which no man can excuse or account for, and of such a nature that even the person who makes them must admit that they are "bulls." Such, for instance, as that of the Irishman, who being shown an alarum said, "Oh, sure, I see. I've only to pull the string when I want to awake myself." But such sayings are not "bulls," only humorous inventions. They represent a greater amount of density than any one ever possessed. That the above saying is invented, is proved by the simple fact that alarums have no strings to pull. In the same way the lines quoted by Lever—

"Success to the moon, she's a dear noble creature  
And gives us the daylight all night in the dark,"

did not emanate from a dull, but a clever man.

A "bull" is an imputation of stupidity made by the hearer through the inadvertence of the speaker in whose mind there is no contradiction, but a want of precision in thought or expression. It is a common error where the imagination is stronger than the critical faculty.

The use of cant words renders jests imperfectly intelligible. Greek humour was clearer

in this respect than that of the present day, especially since our vocabulary has been so much enriched from America. Puns also restrict the pleasantries dependent on them to one country, no great loss perhaps, though the greater part of German humour is thus rendered obscure. "Remember," writes Lord Chesterfield, "that the wit, humour, and jokes of most companies are local. They thrive in that particular soil, but will not often bear transplanting. Every company is differently circumstanced, has its peculiar cant and jargon, which may give occasion to wit and mirth within the circle, but would seem flat and insipid in any other, and therefore will not bear repeating. Nothing makes a man look sillier than a pleasantry not relished, or not understood, and if he meets with a profound silence when he expected a general applause, or what is worse if he is desired to explain the *bon mot*, his awkward and embarrassed situation is easier imagined than described." But ignorance of the meaning of words, while it destroys one kind of amusement sometimes creates another. The mistakes of the deaf and of foreigners are often ludicrous. A French gentleman told me that on the morning after his arrival in Italy he rang his bell and called "*De l'eau chaude.*" As he did not seem to be understood he made

signs to his face, and the waiter nodded and withdrew. It was a long time before he reappeared, but when he entered the delay was accounted for, as he had been out to purchase a pot of *rouge*!

But mistakes with regard to the meanings of words are not so common as with regard to their references. We are often ignorant of the state of society, or the manners and customs to which allusion is made. This is the reason why so much of the humour of bygone ages escapes us. In ancient Greece to call a man a frequenter of baths was an insult, not a commendation as it would be at present. With them the class who are "so very clean and so very silly" was large, and the golden youth of the period, under the pretence of ablution, spent their time in idleness and luxury in these "baths"—which corresponded in some respects to our clubs. To give an example in modern literature—when Charles Lamb in his *Life of Liston* records that his hero was descended from a Johan d'Elistone, who came over with the Conqueror, and was rewarded for his prowess with a grant of land at Lupton Magna, many people had so little knowledge or insight as to take this humorous invention to be an historical fact.

Laughter for want of knowledge is especially

manifested among savages, when they first come into contact with civilization. A missionary relating his experiences among the South Sea islanders observes how much he was astonished at their laughing at what seemed to him the most ordinary occurrences. This was owing to their utter ignorance of matters commonly known to us. He tells us one day when the sailors were boring a hole to put a vent peg into a cask, the fermentation caused the porter to spirt out upon them. One of them tried in vain to stop it with his hand, but it flew through his fingers. Meanwhile a native who stood by burst into a fit of immoderate laughter. The sailor, thinking it a serious matter to lose so much good liquor, asked him rather angrily why he was laughing at the porter running out. "Oh," replied the native, "I'm not laughing at its coming out, but at thinking what trouble it must have cost you to put it in."

But ignorance has often produced opposite results to these, and caused very ludicrous statements to be made seriously. Thus a French Gazette reports that "Lord Selkirk arrived in Paris this morning. He is a descendant of the famous Selkirk whose adventures suggested to Defoe his Robinson Crusoe." Among the various curious and useful items of knowledge contained in the "*Almanach de*

Gotha,"—the first number of which was published 111 years ago—we find it gravely stated that the Manghians of the island of Mindoro are furnished with tails exactly five inches in length, and the women of Formosa with beards half a foot long. I remember having, upon one occasion, visited the Mammertine prison at Rome with a young friend preparing for the army, and his asking me "What had St. Peter and St. Paul done to be confined here?" "They were here for being Christians," I replied, "Oh, were St. Peter and St. Paul Christians? I suppose they were put in prison by these horrid Roman Catholics."

We may say generally that any fresh acquisition of knowledge destroys one source of amusement and opens another. But if our mental powers were to become perfect, which they never will, we should cease to laugh at all. Wisdom or knowledge—the study of our own thoughts or of those of others—has a tendency to alter our general views, and affects our appreciation of humour, even where it affords no special information on the subject before us. Upon given premises the conclusions of the highly cultivated are different from those of others; and intellectual humour is that which generally they enjoy most—finding more pleasure in thought than in emotion. No

doubt they sometimes appreciate what is lighter, especially when a reaction taking place after severe study, they feel like children let out to play. But ordinarily they certainly appreciate most that rare and subtle humour which inferior minds cannot understand. Herbert Spencer is probably correct that "we enjoy that humour most at which we laugh least." But we must not conclude from this rule that we can at will by repressing our laughter increase our pleasure. The statement refers to the cases of different persons or of the same person under different circumstances. Rude and uneducated people would little feel the humour at which they could not laugh, and some grave people entirely miss much that is amusing. "The nervous energy," he says, "which would have caused muscular action, is discharged in thought," but this presupposes a very sensitive mental organization into which the discharge can be made. Where this does not exist, laughter accompanies the appreciation of humour, and in silence there would be little pleasure. The cause of mirth also differs as the persons affected, and the farce which creates a roar in the pit will often not raise a smile in the boxes. Swift writes—"Bombast and buffoonery, by nature lofty and light, soar highest of all in the theatre, and would be lost

in the roof, if the prudent architect had not contrived for them a fourth place called the twelvepenny gallery and there planted a suitable colony." That emotionable ebullition affords a lower class less enjoyment than intellectual action gives a higher order of mind, must be somewhat uncertain. A thoughtful nature is probably happier than an emotional, but it is difficult to compare the pleasure derived from intellectual, moral, and sensuous feelings.

It is a common saying that "there is no disputing taste," and in this respect we allow every man a certain range. But when he transgresses this limit he often becomes ludicrous, especially to those whose tastes rather tend in the opposite direction. The strange figure and accoutrements of Don Quixote raised great laughter among the gay ladies at the inn, and induced the puissant knight-errant to administer to them the rebuke "Excessive laughter without cause denotes folly."

A friend of mine, desirous of giving an intellectual treat to the rustics in the neighbourhood, announced that a reading of Shakespeare would be given in the village schoolroom by a celebrated elocutionist. The villagers, attracted by the name, came in large numbers, and laughed vociferously at all the pathetic parts, but looked grave at the humour. This was,

no doubt, partly owing to their habits of life, as well as to a want of taste and information. Taste for music, and familiarity with the traditional style of the Opera, enable us to enjoy dialogues in recitative, but were a man in ordinary conversation to deliver himself in musical cadences, or even in rhyme, we should consider him supremely ridiculous.

Translations have often exhibited very strange vagaries of taste. Thus, Castalio's rendering of "The Song of Solomon" is ludicrous from the use of diminutives.

"Mea columbula, ostende mihi tuum vulticulum.  
Cerviculam habes Davidicæ turris similem—Cervicula  
quasi eburnea turricula," &c.

Beattie is severe upon Dryden's obtuseness in his translation of the "Iliad." "Homer," he says, "has been blamed for degrading his gods into mortals, but Dryden has made them blackguards. . . . If we were to judge of the poet by the translator, we should imagine the Iliad to have been partly designed for a satire upon the clergy."

Addison observes that the Ancients were not particular about the bearing of their similes. "Homer likens one of his heroes, tossing to and fro in his bed and burning with resentment, to a piece of flesh broiled on the coals." "The present Emperor of Persia," he continues, "con-



formable to the Eastern way of thinking, amidst a great many pompous titles, denominates himself the 'Son of Glory,' and 'Nutmeg of Delight.' " Eastern nations indulge in this kind of hyperbole, which seems to us rather to overstep the sublime, but we cannot be astonished when we read in the Zgand-Savai (Golden Tulip) of China, that "no one can be a great poet, unless he have the majestic carriage of the elephant, the bright eyes of the partridge, the agility of the antelope, and a face rivalling the radiance of the full moon."

Reflection is generally antagonistic to humour, just as abstraction of mind will prevent our feeling our hands being tickled. Often what was intended to amuse, merely produces thought on some social or physical question. But the variability of our appreciation of humour, is most commonly recognised in the differences of moral feeling. We have often heard people say that it is wrong for people to jest on this or that subject, or that they will not laugh at such ribaldry. The excitement necessary for the enjoyment of humour is then neutralized by deeper feelings, and they are perhaps more inclined to sigh than to laugh, or the nervous action being entirely dormant, they remain unaffected. But not only do people's feelings on various subjects differ in kind and in amount,

but also in result. The same idea produces different emotions in different men, and the same emotion different effects. One man will regard an event as insignificant, and will not laugh at it; another will consider it important, but still will be unable to keep his countenance, where most men would be grave. The experience of daily life teaches us that different men act very differently under the same kind of emotion. The Ancients laughed at calamities, which would call forth our commiseration, their consideration for others not being so great, nor their appreciation of suffering so acute. But in the cases of some few individuals, and of barbarous nations, we sometimes find at the present day instances of the ludicrous seasoned with considerable hostility. Flögel tells us that he knew a man in Germany who took especial delight in witnessing tortures and executions, and related the circumstances attending them with the greatest enjoyment and laughter. In "Two Years in Fiji," we read, "Among the appliances which I had brought with me to Fiji, from Sydney, were a stethoscope and a scarifier. Nothing was considered more witty by those in the secret than to place this apparently harmless instrument on the back of some unsuspecting native, and touch the spring.

In an instant twelve lancets would plunge into the swarthy flesh. Then would follow a long-drawn cry, scarcely audible amidst peals of laughter from the bystanders."

It has been said that our non-appreciation of hostile humour is much owing to the suppression of feeling in conventional society, but I think that there is also an influence in civilization, which subdues and directs our emotions. A certain difference in this respect can be traced in the higher and lower classes of the population. This, and the difference in reasoning power, have led to the observation that "the last thing in which a cultivated man can have community with the vulgar is in jocularity."

Jesting on religious subjects, has generally arisen from scepticism, deficiency in taste, or disbelief in the injurious consequences of the practice. Some consider that levity is likely to bring any subject it touches into contempt, or is only fitly used in connection with light subjects; while others regard it as merely a source of harmless pleasure, and can even laugh at a joke against themselves. In like manner some consider it inconsistent with the profession of religion to attend balls, races, or theatres, or even to wear gay-coloured clothes. Congreve has been blamed even for calling a coachman a "Jehu." On the other hand, at the beginning

of this century, "a man of quality" could scarcely get through a sentence without some profane expletive. Sir Walter Scott makes a highwayman lament that, although he could "swear as round an oath as any man," he could never do it "like a gentleman." Lord Melbourne was so accustomed to garnish his conversation in this way that Sydney Smith once said to him, "We will take it for granted that everybody is damned, and now proceed with the subject." In former times, and even sometimes in our own day, the most eminent Christians have occasionally indulged in jest. At the time of the Reformation, a martyr comforted a fellow-sufferer, Philpot, by telling him he was a "pot filled with the most precious liquor;" and Latimer called bad passions "Turks," and bade his hearers play at "Christian Cards." "Now turn up your trump—hearts are trumps." Robert Hall, a most pious Christian, was constantly transgressing in this direction, and I have heard Mr. Moody raise a roar of laughter while preaching.

Now it is quite impossible to say that in any of the above cases there was a want of faith, although we are equally unable to agree with those who maintain that profane jests are most common when it is the strongest. What they show is a want of control of feel-

ing, or a deficiency in taste, so that people do not regard such things as either injurious or important. A sceptic at the present day is generally less profane than a religious man was in the last century. Such is the result of civilization, although unbelief in itself inclines to profanity, and faith to reverence.

It is self-evident that peculiar feelings and convictions will prevent our regarding things as ludicrous, at which we should otherwise be highly amused. Religious veneration, or the want of it, often causes that to appear sacred to one person which seems absurd to another. Many Jewish stories seem strange to Gentile comprehensions. Elias Levi states that he had been told by many old and pious rabbis that at the costly entertainment at which the Messiah should be welcomed among the Jews, an enormous bird should be killed and roasted, of which the Talmud says that it once threw an egg out of its nest which crushed three hundred lofty cedars, and when broken, swept away sixty villages.

The following petition was signed by sixteen girls of Charleston, S.C., and presented to Governor Johnson in 1733, and was no doubt thought to set forth a serious evil.

“The humble petition of all the maids whose names are under written. Whereas we, the humble petitioners are at present in a very melancholy disposition of mind, considering how all the bachelors are blindly captivated by widows, the consequence is this our request that your Excellency will for the future order that no widow presume to marry any young man until the maids are provided for, or else to pay each of them a fine. The great disadvantage it is to us maids, is that the widows by their forward carriages do snap up the young men, and have the vanity to think their merit beyond ours which is a just imposition on us who ought to have the preferencce. This is humbly recommended to your Excellency’s consideration, and we hope you will permit no further insults. And we poor maids in duty bound will ever pray,” &c.

It is almost impossible to limit the number of influences, which affect our appreciation of the ludicrous. “Nothing,” writes Goethe, “is more significant of a man’s character than what he finds laughable.” We find highly intellectual men very different in this respect. Quintilian notices the different kind of humour of Aulus Galba, Junius Bassus, Cassius Severus, and Domitius Afer. In modern times Pitt was grave; Fox, Melbourne, and Canning were witty. Sir Henry Holland enumerates as the wits of his day, Canning, Sydney Smith, Jekyll, Lord Alvanley, Lord Dudley, Hookham Frere, Luttrell, Rogers, and Theodore Hook, and he adds—

“Scarcely two of the men just named were witty exactly in the same vein. In Jekyll and Hook the talent of the simple punster predominated, but in great perfection of the art, while Bishop Blomfield and Baron Alderson, whom I have often seen in friendly conflict, enriched this art by the high classical accompaniments they brought to it. The

witt of Lord Dudley, Lord Alvanley, and Rogers was poignant, personal sarcasm; in Luttrell it was perpetual fun of lighter and more various kind, and whimsically expressed in his features, as well as in his words.\* 'Natio comæda est' was the maxim of his mind and denoted the wide field of his humour. The wit of Mr. Canning was of rarer and more refined workmanship, and drew large ornament from classical sources. The 'Anti-Jacobin' shows Mr. Canning's power in his youthful exuberance. When I knew him it had been sobered, perhaps saddened, by the political contrarities and other incidents of more advanced life, but had lost none of its refinement of irony. Less obvious than the common wit of the world, it excited thought and refined it—one of the highest characteristics of this faculty.

"Lady Morley bore off the palm among the 'witty women' of the day. She was never 'willing to wound.' Her printed pieces, though short and scattered, attest the rare merits of her humour. The 'Petition of the Hens of Great Britain to the House of Commons against the Importation of French eggs,' is an excellent specimen of them."

In corroboration of this view of the different complexion of men's humour I may mention that in the course of this work I have often had the sayings of various wits intermixed and have always been able easily to assign each to its author.

Considering the great diversity in the appreciation of the ludicrous, the question arises is it merely a name for many different emotions, or has it always some invariable character. To

\* It may be observed that as men's perceptions of humour are different, so in the expression of them there is a character about laughter in accordance with its subject, and with the person from whom it comes.

decide this we may ask the question, Is one kind of humour better than another? Practically the answer is given every day, one saying being pronounced "good" if not "capital," and another "very poor," or a "mild" joke; and when we see humour varying with education, and with the ages of men and nations, we cannot but suppose that there are gradations of excellence in it.

Now, if we allow generally this ascending scale in the ludicrous, we admit a basis of comparison, and consequently a link between the various circumstances in which it is found. It may be objected that in the somewhat similar case of Beauty, there is no connection between the different kinds. But the ludicrous stands alone among the emotions, and is especially in contrast with that of Beauty in this—that it is peculiarly dependent on the judgment, as beauty is on the senses. That we understand more about the ludicrous than about beauty is evident from its being far easier to make what is beautiful appear ludicrous than what is ludicrous appear beautiful.

There is something unique in the perception of the ludicrous. It seems to strike and pass away too quickly for an emotion. The lightness of the impression produced by laughter



is the reason why, although we often remember to have felt alarmed or pleased in dreams, we never remember to have been amused. The imperfect circulation of the blood in the head during sleep causes the reason to be partially dormant, and leads to strange fantasies being brought before us. But that our judgment is not entirely inactive is evident from the emotions we feel, and among them is the ludicrous, for many people laugh in their sleep, and when they are awakened think over the strange visions. They then laugh, but never remember having done so before. Memory is much affected by sleep, the greater number of our dreams are entirely forgotten, and the emotions and circumstances of the ludicrous easily pass from our remembrance.

Bacon considered the ludicrous too intellectual to be called a "passio" or emotion. It has commonly been regarded as almost an intuitive faculty. We speak of "seeing" humour, and of having a "sense" of the ludicrous. We think that we have a sense in other matters, where reflection is not immediately perceptible, as when in music or painting we at once observe that a certain style produces a certain effect, and that a certain means conduces to a certain end. This recognition seems to be made intuitively, and from long habit and

constant observation we come to acquire what appears like a sense, by which without going through any reasoning process we give opinions upon works of Art. The judgment acts from habit so imperceptibly that it is altogether overlooked, and we seem almost to have a natural instinct. We are often as unconscious of its exercise as of the changes going on in our bodily constitution. The compositor sets his types without looking at them; the mathematician solves problems "by inspection," and a well-known physiologist told me he had seen a man read a book while he kept three balls in the air. At times we seem to be more correct when acting involuntarily than when from design. We have heard it said that, if you think of the spelling of a word, you will make a mistake in it, and many can form a good judgment on a subject who utterly fail when they begin to specify the grounds on which it is founded. In many such cases we seem almost to acquire a sense, and, perhaps, for a similar reason we speak of a sense of the ludicrous. We are also, perhaps, influenced by a logical error—the ludicrous seems to us a simple feeling, and as every sense is so, we conclude that all simple feelings are senses.

The ludicrous is not analogous to our bodily senses, in that it is not affected in so constant

and uniform a manner. The sky appears blue to every man, unless he have some visual defect, but an absurd situation is not "taken" by all. In the senses no ratiocination is required, whereas the ludicrous does not come to us directly, but through judgment—a moment, though brief and unnoticed, always elapses in which we grasp the nature of the circumstances before us. If it be asserted that our decision is in this case pronounced automatically, without any exercise of reason, we must still admit that it comes from practice and experience, and not naturally and immediately, like a sense. The arguments taken from profit and expediency, which have led to a belief in moral sense, would, of course, have no weight in the case of the ludicrous.

## CHAPTER XX.

Definition—Difficulties of forming one of Humour.

SOME of the considerations towards the end of the last chapter may have led us to conclude that our sense\* of the ludicrous is not a variety of emotions, but only one; and the possibility of our forming a definition of it depends, not only upon its unity, but upon our being able to trace some common attributes in the circumstances which awaken it. But in one of the leading periodicals of the day, I lately read the observation—made by a writer whose views should not be lightly regarded—that “all the most profound philosophers have pronounced a definition of humour to be hopelessly impracticable.” I think that such an important and fundamental statement as this may be suitably taken into consideration in commencing our examination of the question. As a matter of history, we shall find that it is erroneous, for several great philosophers have given us definitions of the sense of the ludicrous, and few have thought

\* This term seems the nearest, though not quite accurate.

it indefinable. But those who took the former course might be charged with wandering into the province of literature; while the views of those who adopted the latter might be thought incorrect with regard to definition, or unwarranted with regard to humour. To suppose that a definition of humour would be of any great value, would be to think that it would unfold the nature of things, instead of merely giving the meaning of a term; nor is it correct to conclude that by employing a string of words we can reach the precise signification of one, any more than we can hit the mark by striking at each side of it. If the number and variety of our words and thoughts were increased, we could approximate more nearly; but as we know neither the boundaries of our conceptions, nor the natural limits of things, definition can never be perfect or final. Various standards have been sought for it—the common usage of society being generally adopted—but it must always to a certain extent vary, according to the knowledge and approval of the definer.

Scientific definitions are not intended to be complete, except for the study immediately in view. Who ever saw that ghostly line which is length without breadth—and how absurd it is to require of us to draw it! And would

not a country-bumpkin feel as much insulted, if we told him he was a "carnivorous ape," or a "mammi ferous two-handed animal," as the French soldier did when his officer called him a biped? If we give man his old prerogative, a "rational animal," how many would refuse the title to pretty women and spendthrift sons, while others would most willingly bestow it upon their poodles?

Definition cannot be formed without analysis and comparison, and as few people indulge much in either, they accomplish it very roughly, but it answers their purpose, and they are contented until they find themselves wrong. Hence we commonly consider that nearly everything can be defined. We may then call the ludicrous "an element in things which tends to create laughter." This may be considered a fair definition, and although it is quite untrue, and founded on a superficial view of the ludicrous, it may give us the characteristics which men had in view in originally giving the name at a time when they had little consideration or experience. But if we require more, and ask for a definition which will stand the test of philosophical examination, we must reply that such only can be given as is dependent upon the satisfaction of the inquirer. Progressive minds will find it difficult to circumscribe the

meaning of words, especially on matters with which they are well acquainted.

Brown, in his "Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind," observes that the ludicrous is a compound feeling of gladness and astonishment; not a very comprehensive view, for according to it, if a man were informed that he had been left a sum of money, he would regard his good fortune as highly absurd.

Beattie maintains, on the contrary, that the ludicrous is a simple feeling, and therefore indefinable, a statement in which the premise seems more correct than the conclusion. The opinion that it is simple and primary, although not admitting of proof, has some probability in its favour. It arose from a conviction that we had no means of reaching it, of taking it to pieces, and was derived from the unsatisfactory character of such attempts as that of Brown, or from analogy with some other emotions, or with physical substances whose essence we cannot ascertain. If we can connect the ludicrous with certain acts of judgment, we cannot tell how far the emotion is modified by them, and even if we seem to have detected some elements in it, we were not conscious of them at the moment of our being amused. If they exist, they are then undiscernible.

As when we regard a work of art, we are

not sensible of pleasure until all the several elements of beauty are blended together, so if the ludicrous be a compound, there is some power within us that fuses the several emotions into one, and evolves out of them a completely new and distinct feeling. The product has a different nature from its component parts, just as the union of the blue, yellow and red give the simple sensation of whiteness. Regard the elements as separate and the feeling vanishes.

It has probably been owing to reflections of the above kind that some philosophers have stated that the ludicrous is a simple feeling, awakened by certain means, and not a compound or acquired feeling formed of certain elements. But although it is more comfortable to have questions settled and at rest, it is often safer to leave them open, especially where we have neither sufficient knowledge nor power of investigation to bring our inquiries to an issue. It is not, however, correct to say that because feelings are primary or single they cannot be defined. As we cannot take them to pieces or analyse them, we are ignorant with regard to their real nature, and of some we cannot form any definition whatever, the only account we can give of them being to enumerate every object in which they appear; but in the case of others, we are enabled to form a definition



by means of attributes observed in the objects or circumstances which awaken them. We cannot trace any common elements in sugar and scent, or in leaves and emeralds, by which to define sweetness and viridity; but we think we can discern some in the ludicrous. The mere grouping of certain things under one head seems to show that mankind notices some similarity between them. But definition requires more than this; attributes must be observed, and such as are common to all the instances, and where it has been attempted there has been a conviction that such would be found, for without them it would be impossible. When this belief is entertained, a definition is practicable, regarding it not as a perfect or final, but as a possible and approximate limitation. To define accurately, we should summon before us every real circumstance which does, or imaginary one which could, awaken the feeling, and every real and imaginary circumstance which, though very similar, has not this effect. The greater the variety of these instances which have the power, the fewer are the qualities which appear to possess it; and the greater the variety of instances which have it not, the greater the number of the qualities we attribute to it.

It follows that the more numerous are the particulars to be considered, the more difficult

it is to form a definition, and this may have led some to say that the ludicrous, which covers such a vast and varied field, lies entirely beyond it. We might think that we could add and subtract attributes until words and faculties failed us, until, in the one direction, we were reduced to a single point, in fact, to the ludicrous itself—while in the other we are lost in a boundless expanse. To be satisfied with our definition, we must form a narrower estimate of the number of instances, and a higher one of our powers of discrimination.

But there is an alternative—although amusing objects and circumstances are almost innumerable, as we may have gathered from the last chapter, we may claim a license, frequently allowed in other cases, of drawing conclusions from a considerable number of promiscuous examples, and regarding them as a fair sample of the whole. Such a view has no doubt been taken by many able men, who have attempted to define the ludicrous. An eminent German philosopher even said that he did not despair of discovering its real essence.

It must be admitted that we have no actual proof that the provocatives of the ludicrous are innumerable or utterly heterogeneous, nor any greater presumption that they are so than in many cases of physical phenomena which we

are accustomed to define. The difficulty is at the most only that of degree, but we are unusually conscious of it owing to the nature of the subject. Every day, if not every hour, brings ludicrous objects of different kinds before us, whereas the number and variety of plants, animals, and minerals are only known to botanists and zoologists and other scientific men.

As the members of a class are infinitely less numerous than the somewhat similar things which lie outside it, the course commonly adopted has been to examine a few members of it and try to find some of the properties a class possesses, without aspiring to ascertain them all. Our conclusions will thus be co-extensive with our knowledge, rather than with our wishes, incomplete and overwide rather than illogical. How far easier is it, with regard to our present subject, to decide that the circumstances which awaken the ludicrous possess certain elements, than that it requires nothing more! the chemist may analyse the bright water of a natural spring which he can never manufacture. We can sometimes form what is humorous by imitation, but not by following any rules or directions; we even seem to be led more to it by accident than by design.

Our safest plan, therefore, will be to search for some possible elements, and to endeavour to establish some probabilities on a subject which must always be somewhat surrounded with uncertainty. The constant tillage of the soil, the investigations made, and definitions attempted, have not been unproductive of fruit, and we may feel a tolerable degree of assurance on some points in question, while admitting that, however assiduously we labour, there will always be something beyond our reach. We will proceed then to examine and compare the stores of our predecessors, and if possible add a grain to the heap. Knowledge is progressive, and although it is not the lot of man to be assured of absolute truth, still the acquisition of what is relative or approximate is not valueless. This consideration, which has cheered many on the road of physical philosophy, may afford some encouragement to those who follow the equally obscure indications of our mental phenomena.

## CHAPTER XXI.

Charm of Mystery—Complication—Poetry and Humour  
compared—Exaggeration.

ALL who are accustomed to novel reading or writing, are aware of the fascinating power of mystery. They even consider it a principal test of a good story that the plot should be impenetrable, and the final result concealed up to the last page. Tension and excitement are agreeable, even when the subject itself is somewhat painful. We observe this in a tragedy, and it is a common saying some people are never happy except when they are miserable. Such is the constitution of the mind; and the fact that enjoyment can be obtained when we should expect the reverse, is noteworthy with reference to the ludicrous. All mystery causes a certain disquietude, but if the problem seems to us capable of being solved, it begets an agreeable curiosity. On its resolution the excitement ceases, and we only feel a kind of satisfaction, which, though more unalloyed, gives less enjoyment than mystery, inasmuch as it

produces less mental and physical commotion. This tendency in the mind to find pleasure in complexity was observed even by Aristotle.

Experience teaches us that no literary style is attractive without a certain interlacing of thoughts and feelings. The sentiments which are most treasured and survive longest, are those which are conveyed rather in a complex than simple form—emotion is thus most quickened, and memory impressed. The beauty and charm of form lie greatly in its bringing ideas closer together, and succinctness implies fulness of thought. Thus a vast number of paradoxical expressions have been generated, which are far more agreeable than plain language. We speak of “blushing honours,” “liquid music,” “dry wine,” “loud” or “tender colours,” “round flavour,” “cold hearts,” “trembling stars,” “storms in tea-cups,” and a thousand similar combinations, putting the abstract for the concrete, transferring the perception of one sense to another, intermingling the nomenclature of arts, and using a great variety of metaphorical and even ungrammatical phrases. Poets owe much of their power to such combinations, and we find that allusions, which are confessedly the reverse of true, are often the most beautiful, touch the heart deepest, and live longest in the memory. Thus the lover delights to sing—

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"Why does azure deck the sky?  
'Tis to be like thine eyes of blue."

Poetry has been called "the conflict of the elements of our being," and it is a mark of genius to leave much to the imagination of the reader. The higher we soar in poetry and the nearer we approach the sublime, the more the distance between the intertwined ideas increases. But we are scarcely conscious of any contradiction or discordance, as there is always something to resolve and explain it. Thus in "*Il Penseroso*," when we read of "the rugged brow of Night," we think of emblematic representations of Nox, and of the dark contraction of the brow in frowning. There is no breach of harmony, and we always find in poetry stepping stones which enable us to pass over difficulties. Often, too, we are assisted in this direction by the intention or tone of the writer or speaker.

Athenæus exhibits well, in a story fictitious or traditional, the contradictory elements to be found in poetry, and shows how easily metaphorical language may become ludicrous when interpreted according to the letter rather than the spirit. He makes Sophocles say to an Erythræan schoolmaster who wanted to take poetical things literally, "Then this of Simonides does not please you, I suppose, though it seems to the Greeks very well spoken—

“The maid sends her voice  
From out her purple mouth!”

Nor the poet speaking of the golden-haired Apollo, for if the painter had made the hair of the god golden and not black, the painting would be all the worse. Nor the poet speaking of the rosy-fingered Aurora, for if anyone were to dip his fingers into rose-coloured paint, he would make his hands like those of a purple dyer, not of a beautiful woman.”

The praise of women is so common, and we so often compare them to everything beautiful, that the harsh lines in the above similes are coloured over and almost disappear. Such language seems as suitable in poetry, as commonplace information would be tedious, and being the scaffolding by which the ideal rises, the complexity is not prominent as in humour, though it adds to the pleasure afforded. But whenever the verge of harmony is not only reached, but transgressed, the connection of opposite ideas produces a different effect upon us, and we admit that from the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step. When we go beyond the natural we may, if we heed not, enter the unnatural. In such cases we have an additional incentive to mirth—a double complication as it were, from the failure of the original intention.

If there were nothing in the world but what is plain and self-evident, where would be the



romance and wit which form the greatest charm of life. Poetry recognises this; and in comic songs, especially of the Ethiopian class lately so popular, there is rather too prominent an aim to obtain complexity of ideas—sometimes to the verge of nonsense. Humorous sayings are largely manufactured on this plan.

The ideas in humour, although in one respect distant, must be brought close together.\* Protraction in relating a story will cause it to fail, and this is one reason why jokes in a foreign language seldom make us laugh.

Locke speaks of wit as the assemblage of ideas. Most philosophers acknowledge the existence of some conflict in humour, and in many instances of the ludicrous it seems to lie between the real and ideal. External circumstances appear different from what we should expect them to be, and think they ought to be. Thus we have seen a dignified man walking about quite unconscious that a wag has chalked his back, or fastened a "tail" on his coat behind.

Some have attempted to explain all humour on this basis, but the complication in it does not seem capable of being brought under this head. Weiss and Arnold Ruge say it is "the ideal captive by the real"—an opinion similar

to that of Schopenhauer, who calls it "the triumph of intuition over reflection." Of course, this cannot be taken as a definition, for in that case every mistake we make, such as thinking a mountain higher than it is, or a right action wrong, would be laughable. We contemplate acts of injustice or oppression, and failures in art and manufacture, and still feel no inclination to laugh. But we may accept the opinion as an admission of the principle of complication. The ideal and real often meet without any spark being struck, and in some cases the conflict in humour can scarcely be said to lie between them. It is often dependent upon a breach of association, or of some primary ideas or laws of nature. Necessary principles of mind or matter are often violated where things, true under one condition, are represented as being so universally. Our American cousins supply us with many illustrative instances. "A man is so tall that he has to go up a ladder to shave himself." Generally we require to mount, to reach anything in a very high position, but if it were our own head, however lofty we carried it, we should not require a ladder. Somewhat similar is the observation "that a young lady's head-dress is now so high, that she requires to stand on a stool to put it on."

We have heard of a soldier surprising and

surrounding a body of the enemy ; and of a man coming downstairs in the morning, thinking himself someone else. "One man is as good as another," said Thackeray to the Irishman. "No, but much better," was the sharp reply. A somewhat similar breach takes place when something is spoken of under a metaphor, and then expressions applicable to that thing are transferred to that to which it is compared. Passages in literature and oratory thus become unintentionally ludicrous. A dignitary, well known for his conversational and anecdotal powers, told me that he once heard a very flowery preacher exclaim, when alluding to the destruction of the Assyrian host. "Death, that mighty archer, mowed them all down with the besom of destruction." Another clergyman, equally fond of metaphor, enforced the consideration of the shortness of life in the words, "Remember, my brethren, we are fast sailing down the the stream of life, and shall speedily be landed in the ocean of eternity."

Johnson says that wit is "a *discordia concors*, a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." Many have considered that humour consists of contrast or comparison, and it is true that a large portion of it owes

much to attributes of relation. This kind of humorous complication is generally under the form of saying that a thing is *like* something—from which it is essentially different—merely because of the existence of some accidental similitude. There are many kinds and degrees of this, and some points of resemblance may be found in all things. We say “one man is like another,” “a man may make himself like a brute,” &c. Similitudes in minute detail may be pointed out in things widely different; and from this range of significations the word *like* has been most prolific of humour. It properly means, a real and essential likeness, and to use it in any other sense, is to employ it falsely. But our amusement is greatly increased when associations are violated, and much amusement may be made by showing there is some considerable likeness between two objects we have been accustomed to regard as very far apart. The smaller the similarity pointed out the slighter is the chain which connects the distant objects, and the less we are inclined to laugh. But the more we draw the objects together, the greater is the complication and the humour. We are then inclined to associate the qualities of the one with the other, and a succession of grotesque images is suggested backwards and forwards, before the

amusement ceases. One principal reason why the mention of a drunken man, a tailor, or a lover, inclines us to mirth, is that they are associated in our minds with absurd actions. Laughter is generally greatest when we are intimately acquainted with the person against whom it is directed. We have often noticed the absurd effect produced in literature when words are used which, although suitable to the subject literally, are remote from it in association. The extreme subtlety of these feelings render it impossible sometimes to give any explanation of the ideas upon which a humorous saying is founded, and may be noticed in many words, the bearings of which we can feel, but not specify. A vast number of thoughts and emotions are always passing through the mind, many of them being so fine that we cannot detect them. The results of some of them can be traced as we have before observed in the proficiency which is acquired by practice but can never be imparted by mere verbal instruction.

If things compared together are given too slight a connection, the associations will not be transferred from one to the other, and the wit fails, as in Cowley's extravagant fancy work on the basis of his mistress' eyes,

being like burning-glasses. The objects must also be far enough apart for contrast—the farther the better, provided the distance be not so great as to change humour into the ludicrous. Referring to the desirability of a good literal translation of Homer, Beattie makes the following amusing comparisons.

“Something of this kind the world had reason to expect from Madame Dacier, but was disappointed. Homer, as dressed out by that lady, has more of the Frenchman, in his appearance than of the old Grecian. His beard is close shaved, his hair powdered, and there is even a little *rouge* on his cheek. To speak more intelligibly, his simple and nervous diction is often wire-drawn into a flashy and feeble paraphrase, and his imagery as well as humour, sometimes annihilated by abbreviation. Nay, to make him the more modish, the good lady is at pains to patch up his style with unnecessary phrases and flourishes in the French taste, which have just such an effect in a translation of Homer, as a bag-wig, and snuff-box would have in a picture of Achilles.”

In parody a slight likeness in form and expression brings together ideas with very different associations. Several instances of this may be found in a preceding chapter. By increasing points of similarity between distant objects, poetry may be changed into humour. Addison remarks that “If a lover declare that his mistress’ breast is as white as snow, he makes a commonplace observation, but when he adds with a sigh, that it is as cold too, he approaches to wit.” The former simile is only poetical, but the latter draws the comparison

too close, the complication becomes too strong, and we feel inclined to laugh. Addison merely notices the number of points of similitude, but the reason they produce or augment humour, is that they make the solution difficult.

When it is easy to limit and disentangle the likeness and unlikeness, the pleasantry is small, as where Butler says—

“The sun had long since, in the lap  
Of Thetis, taken out his nap,  
And, like a lobster boiled, the moon  
From black to red began to turn.”

Here there is no element of truth—the things are too far apart. A humorous comparison should not be entirely fanciful, and without basis; otherwise we should have no complication.

Many humorous sayings, especially those found in comic papers, fail for want of foundation. That would-be wit which has no element of truth is always a failure, and may appear romantic, dull or ludicrous—or simply nonsensical. As in a novel, the more pure invention there is the duller we find it, so here the more like truth, the error appears the better. The finer the balance, the nearer doubt is approached, provided it be not reached, the more excellent and artistic the humour. Gross exaggeration is not humorous. There is too much of this extravagant and spurious

humour in the comic literature of the day. "Many men," writes Addison, "if they speak nonsense believe they are talking humour; and when they have drawn together a scheme of absurd inconsistent ideas are not able to read it over to themselves without laughing. These poor gentlemen endeavour to gain themselves the reputation of wits and humorists by such monstrous conceits as almost qualify them for Bedlam, not considering that humour should be always under the check of reason." There is nothing pleasant in nonsense. In both humour and the ludicrous the imperfection must refer to some kind of right or truth, and revolve, as it were, round a fixed axis. "To laugh heartily we must have reality," writes Marmontel, and it is remarkable that most good comic situations have been taken from the author's own experience. The best kind of humour is the most artistic embellishment of the ludicrous.

The fact that humour is often found in comparisons, probably led Léon Dumont to consider that it arose from the meeting of two opposite ideas in the mind. But often there is no contrast. It does not always strike us that the state of things present before us is different from some other clearly defined condition. We do not necessarily see that a thing is



wrong as differing from something else, but as opposing some standard in our minds which it is often difficult to determine. We sometimes laugh at another person's costume, though it does not occur to us that he should be dressed as ourselves, or according to some particular fashion, nor could we point out at what precise point it diverges from the code of propriety. But by reflecting we could probably mark the deviation. The ludicrous often suggests comparisons; when we see something absurd we often try to find a resemblance to something else, but this is after we have been amused, and we sometimes say of a very ridiculous man, that we "do not know what he is like."

Humorous complications appear under many forms and disguises. The Americans have lately introduced an indifferent kind of it under the form of an ellipse—an omission of some important matter. Thus, the editor of a Western newspaper announces that if any more libels are published about him, there will be several first class funerals in his neighbourhood. Again, "An old Maine woman undertook to eat a gallon of oysters for one hundred dollars. She gained fifteen—the funeral costing eighty-five." Another common form of humorous complication is taking an expression in a different sense from that it usually bears.

“You cannot eat your cake, and have your cake;” “But how,” asks the wilful child, “am I to eat my cake, if I don’t have it?” Thackeray speaks of a young man who possessed every qualification for success—except talent and industry.

In many other common forms of speech there are openings for specious amendments, sometimes for real ones, especially in ironical expressions. But as in pronunciation we regard usage rather than etymology, so in sense the true meaning is not the literal or grammatical, but the conventional. Much indifferent humour is made of question and answer;—the reply being given falsely, as if the interrogation were put in a different sense from that intended, an occasion for the quibble being given by some loose or perhaps literal meaning of the words. Thus, “Have you seen Patti?” *A.* “Yes.” *Q.* “What in?” *A.* “A brougham.”

Indelicacy or irreverence is unpleasant in itself, and yet when complication is added to it few of us can avoid laughing, and I am afraid that some considerably enjoy objectionable allusions. To tell a man to go to h—, or that he deserves to go there, is merely coarse and profane abuse, but when a labourer is found by an irritable country gentleman piling up a heap of stones in front of his house, and being

rated for causing such an obstruction, asks where else he is to take them, and is told "to h— if you like," we are amused at the answer—"Indeed, then, if I was to take them to heaven, they'd be more out of your way." Thus, also, to call a man an ass would not win a smile from most of us, but we relax a little when the writers in a high church periodical, addicted to attacking Mr. Spurgeon, upon being accused of being actuated by envy, retort that they know the commandment—"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's ass."

If we examine carefully the circumstances which awaken the ludicrous, we shall probably come to conclude that they often contain something which puzzles our understanding. An act which seems ridiculous would not appear so if we could entirely account for it, for instance, if it were done to win a bet. There seems to be in the ludicrous not merely some error in the taste brought before us, but something which we can scarcely believe to be the case. This alone would account for some variation, for what seems unintelligible to the ignorant seems plain to the educated, and what puzzles the well-informed raises no question among the inexperienced. The ludicrous depends upon that kind of intellectual twilight which is the lot of man here below. Were

our knowledge perfect we should no more laugh than angelic beings,\* were it final we should be as grave as the lower animals. Humour exists where the faculties are not fully developed, and our capacities are beyond our attainments, but fails where the mind has reached its limit, or feels no forward impulse. Study and high education are adverse to mirth, because the mind becomes impressed with the universality of law and order, and when learned men are merry, they are so mostly from being of genial or sympathetic natures. Density and dullness of intelligence are also unfavourable to humour from the absence of sensibility and generalization. We find that those whose experience is imperfect are most inclined to mirth. This is the reason why children, especially those of the prosperous classes, are so full of merriment. They are not only highly emotional, but have inquiring and progressive minds, while their experience being small, and generalization imperfect, they see much that appears strange and perplexing to them; but their laughter is never hearty as in the case of those whose views are more formed.†

\* Ruskin observes that the smile on the lips of the Apollo Belvedere is inconsistent with divinity.

† The false generalisations of childhood are well represented by Dickens when, in "Great Expectations," he makes Pip discover a singular affinity between seeds an

Exaggeration always contains either falsity, or complication, and when it is used for humour the deficiency is made up. It easily affords amusement, because it can bring together the most distant and discordant ideas. American wits have made great use of it. Thus we read of a man driving his gig at such a pace along the high road that his companion, looking at the mile stones, asked what cemetery they were passing through? One of the same country described the extent of his native land in the following terms: "It is bounded on the North by the Aurora Borealis, on the South by the Southern Cross, on the East by the rising sun, and on the West by the Day of Judgment." The same may be said of diminution which is only humorous when connecting distant ideas. In "The Man of Taste," a poem, by the Rev. T. Bramstone in Dodsley's collection, we read—

"My hair I'll powder in the women's way,  
And dress and talk of dressing more than they;  
I'll please the maids of honour if I can,  
Without black velvet breeches—what is man?"

Longinus, says, "He was possessor of a field as small as a Lacedæmonian letter." Their letters often consisted only of two or three words. corduroys. "Mr. Pumblechook wore corduroys, and so did his shopman, and somehow there was a general air and flavour about the corduroys so much in the nature of seeds, and such a general air and flavour about the seeds in the nature of corduroys that I hardly knew which was which."

A gentleman I met on one occasion in a train, speaking of a lady friend, observed—"She's very small, but what there is of her is very, very good. Why, she'd go into that box," pointing to one for sandwiches. "She's not bigger than that umbrella. 'Pon my honour as a gentleman, she's not."

Humour, by means of the perplexity it produces, often gains the victory over strong emotions. This fact has been practically recognised by orators, who see that when a man is struck by a humorous allusion, powerful feelings which could not otherwise be swayed give way, and even firm resolutions seem for the moment shaken and changed. We are bribed by our desire for pleasure, and a man thus often seems to sympathise with those he really opposes and can even be made to laugh at himself—strong antagonistic sensations and emotions being conquered by complexity. To most persons nothing can be more solemn than the thought of death, except its actual presence; but Theramenes was light-hearted when the hemlock bowl was presented to him, and drinking it off could not, as he threw out the dregs, resist exclaiming "To the health of the lovely Critias."\* Sir Thomas More was jocose upon

\* Critias was one of the thirty tyrants who condemned him.

the scaffold. Baron Görz, when being led to death, said to his cook—"It's all over now, my friend, you will never cook me a good supper again." The poet Kleist, who was killed in the battle of Kunersdorf, was seized with a violent fit of laughter just before he expired, when he thought of the extraordinary faces a Cossack, who had been plundering him, made over the prize he had found. In the same way a lady told me that a friend of hers, having had a severe fall from his horse, drew a caricature of the accident while the litter was being prepared for him. Scarron was constantly in bodily suffering; and Norman Macleod wrote some humorous verses "On Captain Frazer's Nose" when he was enduring such violent pain that he spent the night in his study, and had occasionally to bend over the back of a chair for relief.

Charles Mathews retained his love of humour to the last. I have heard that, when dying at Plymouth, he ordered himself to be laid out as if dead. The doctor on entering exclaimed, "Poor, fellow he's gone! I knew he would not last long," and was just leaving the room with some sad reflections, when he heard the lamented man chuckling under the sheet.

Thus, also, a German General relates that after a skirmish a French hussar was brought

in with a huge slash across his face. "Have you received a sabre cut, my poor fellow?" asked the General. "Pooh, I was shaved too closely this morning," was the reply. Something may be attributed in such cases to nervous excitement, which seeks relief in some counteraction. Mr. Hardy observes that there appears to be always a superficial film of consciousness which is left disengaged and open to the notice of trifles.

Addison says that false humour differs from true, as a monkey does from a man. He goes on to say that false humour is given to little apish tricks, and buffooneries. Now the reason why Addison and cultivated men in general do not laugh at buffooneries and place them in the catalogue of false humour, is simply because they do not present to their minds any complication. When harlequin knocks the clown and pantaloon over on their backs, "the gods" burst with laughter, unable to understand the catastrophe, but those who have seen such things often, and consider that men make a living by such tricks, see nothing at all strange in it, remain grave and perhaps wearied. It was the want of complication that probably prevented Uncle Shallow from complying with the simple Slender's request to "Tell Mistress Anne the jest how my father stole two geese out of a pen."



It may be almost unnecessary to observe that all errors in taste are not ludicrous. "Tea-boardy" pictures do not make us laugh, we only attribute them to unskilful artists, of whom unfortunately there are too many. Nor is the ludicrous to be classed under the head of taste; very often that which awakens it offers no violence to our æsthetic sensibilities. It is true that in Art, that which appears ludicrous will always be distasteful, for it will offend the eye or ear, but it is something more, and we occasionally speak as though it were outside taste altogether. Thus when we see some very evident failure in a sketch, we say "this is a most wretched work, and out of all drawing," and add as a climax of disapprobation "It is perfectly ridiculous." A violation of taste is never sufficient for the ludicrous, and the ludicrous is not always a violation of taste.

There is something in humour beyond what is merely unexpected. I remember a physician telling me that a gentleman objected very much to some prescriptions given to his wife, and wanted some quack medicines tried. The doctor opposed him, and on the gentleman calling on him and telling him he was unfit for his profession, there was an open rupture between them, and they cut each other in the street. Not long afterwards the gentleman died, and

left him a legacy of £500. The doctor could not help being amused at the bequest under such circumstances, though, had it come equally unexpectedly from a mere stranger, he would have been merely surprised.

In some humorous sayings we find several different complications, which increase the force. Coincidences of this kind not only add to, but multiply humour in which when of a high class the complexity is very subtle. It has much increased since ancient times, there was a large preponderance of emotion.

## CHAPTER XXII.

Imperfection—An Impression of Falsity implied—Two Views taken by Philosophers—Firstly that of Voltaire, Jean Paul, Brown, the German Idealists, Léon Dumont, Secondly that of Descartes, Marmontel and Dugald Stewart—Whately on Jests—Nature of Puns—Effect of Custom and Habit—Accessory Emotion—Disappointment and Loss—Practical Jokes.

**A**LTHOUGH a distinction can be drawn in humour between the sense of wrong and the complication which accompanies it, still, as in any given case, the two flow out of the same circumstances, there seems to be some indissoluble link between them. It is not necessary to say that the sense of the ludicrous is a compound feeling, to maintain that it has the appearance of containing or being connected with something like a feeling of disapprobation.

Moreover, all the elements contained must be perfectly fused together before the ludicrous can be appreciated, just as Sir T. Macintosh observes of Beauty, "Until all the separate pleasures which create it be melted into one—as long as any of them are discerned and felt

as distinct from each other—qualities which gratify are not called by the name of Beauty,” and when we say that the humour consists of an emotion awakened by an exercise of judgment, we do not pretend to determine how far the emotion has been modified by judgment, and judgment directed by emotion.

We cannot properly suppose that there is anything really wrong in external objects brought before us, and did we recognise that everything moves in a regular pre-ordained course, we should be obliged to consider everything right, and conclude that the error we observe is imaginary, and flows from our own false standard. We do so with regard to the so-called works of Nature, and, therefore, we never laugh at a rock or a tree—no matter how strange its form. But in the general circumstances brought before us the reign of law is not so clear, especially when they depend on the actions of men, which we feel able to pronounce judgment upon, and condemn when opposed to our ideal. In humorous representations we are actually beholding what is false ; in ludicrous we think we are, though we cannot avoid at times detecting some infirmity in our own discernment. Thus, in the case of a child's puzzle, a person unable to solve it sometimes exclaims, “ How dull I am ! I ought

to be able to do it," and people occasionally find fault with their senses, as we sometimes see them laughing when dazzled by rapidly revolving colours. Such instances may suggest to us that the fault we find really originates in our own obtuseness.

But before proceeding, we must allow that philosophers and literary men are divided in opinion as to the existence of any feeling of wrong in the ludicrous. Voltaire, tilting against the windmills which the old animosity school had set up, observes, "When I was eleven years old, I read all alone for the first time the 'Amphitryon' of Molière, and I laughed until I was on the point of falling down. Was this from hostility? — one is not hostile when alone!" This will not seem to most of us more conclusive reasoning than that of his opponents. We seldom laugh when alone, although we often feel angry.

Dryden says "Wit is a propriety of words and thoughts adapted to the subject," and Pope gives us a similar opinion in the following words—

"True wit is nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed,  
Something whose truth convinced at sight we find.  
That gives us back the image to our mind."

Taking this view of the subject, we should be inclined to think the Psalms of David

especially witty, and to agree with the pretentious young lady who, being asked what she thought of Euclid, replied at a hazard that "It was the wittiest book she had ever read." But it seems probable from other passages in Pope's works that he did not here intend to give a full definition, but only some characteristics. Moreover, in former times, Wit was not properly distinguished from Wisdom, and the above authors probably used the word in the old sense. Young says, "Well-judging wit is a flower of wisdom," to which we may reply in the words of an old proverb, "Wit and Wisdom, like the seven stars, are seldom found together."

Brown, in his lectures on "The Human Understanding," observes that in the ludicrous we do not condemn, but admire, and he cites as an illustration the case of some friends dining at an hotel. Boniface smilingly inquires what wine they would like to drink. One says Champagne, another Claret, another Burgundy, but the last one observes knowingly that he should like that best for which he should not have to pay. Now in this there is certainly a fault, for the answer is not applicable to the question. Brown's theory is that the ludicrous arises from the contemplation of incongruities, and he finds himself somewhat puzzled when he considers that the incongruities in science—

in chemistry, for instance—do not make us laugh. He is at some trouble to explain that the importance of the subject renders us serious. But had he recognised the fact that the ludicrous implies condemnation, he would have seen that we could not be amused at incongruities in science, because we have a strong conviction that they are not real but only apparent. Some very ignorant persons, as he observes, do occasionally laugh at philosophic truths. I knew a lady who laughed at being told of the great distance of the planets, and a gentleman assured me that a friend of his, a man who had such shrewdness that he rose from the lowest ranks and acquired £100,000, would never believe that the earth was round!

Jean Paul, taking the same admiration view, observes that “women laugh more than men, and the haughty Turk not at all.” But are not these facts referable to comparative excitability and apathy, and also to the multiplicity and variety of female ideas compared with the dulness of the Moslem’s apprehension. Jean Paul proceeds to say that the more people laugh at our joke, the better we are pleased, and that this does not seem as though the enjoyment came from a feeling of triumph. But what is really laughed at is the humour, and not the humorist, and as

a man wishes the beauty of a poem he has written to be generally acknowledged, so he desires to see the point of his satire appreciated by as many as possible.

A fruitful source of error in the investigation of humour arises from the difficulty in determining where it lies—of localizing it, if I may be allowed the expression. We hear a very amusing observation, and at once join heartily in the laugh, but cannot say whether we are laughing at a circumstance or a person, at a representation or a reality.

We come now to the most important authority on this side of the question. The systems which the German philosophers have propounded are more serviceable to themselves than edifying to the ordinary reader. High abstractions afford but a very vague and indefinite idea to the mind, nor can their application be fully understood but by those who have ascended the successive stages by which each philosopher has himself mounted. On the present subject, their opinions seem to have been influenced by their views on other subjects. As we have already observed, Kant and several of the leading German idealists are in favour of considering the ludicrous as a "resolution" or a "deliverance of the absolute, captive by the finite," an opinion which reminds us of



Hobbes' old theory of "glorying over others." The difference between their views and that of most authorities is not so great as it at first appears; they admit a "negation" of truth and beauty, but found the ludicrous, not upon this, but upon the re-birth which follows. This step in advance, taken in accordance with their general philosophy, may be correct, but it does not seem warranted by the mere examination of the subject itself. Can we say that at the instant of laughter we regard not that something is wrong, but that the reverse of it is right? When humour is brought before us, do we feel in any way instructed? This rebirth from a negation must seem somewhat visionary. What, for instance, is the truth to be gathered from the following. "I wish," said a philanthropic orator, "to be a friend to the friendless, a father to the fatherless, and a widow to the widowless."

Probably, the philosopher who formed the rebirth theory had looked at ludicrous events rather than humorous stories—and it may be urged that we laugh at the former when we are set right, and are convinced of having been really mistaken. But at the moment what excites mirth is something that seems wrong. We meet a friend, for instance, in a place where we little expected to see him, and perhaps

smile at the meeting. Had we known all his movements we should not have been thus surprised, but we were ignorant of them. Here we may say our views are corrected, and our amusement comes from a resolution or rebirth. But reflection will show that whatever our final conclusion may be, we laugh at what seems to us, at the moment, unaccountable and wrong; and as soon as we begin to correct ourselves, and to see how the event occurred, our merriment disappears.

Many instances will occur to us in which what is really right may appear wrong. Most of us have heard the proverb "If the day is fine take an umbrella, if it rains do as you like." It may give good advice, but we should be much inclined to laugh at anyone who adopted it.

Léon Dumont, the latest writer who has added considerably to our knowledge on this subject, does not admit the existence of imperfection in the ludicrous. But the arguments which he adduces do not seem to be conclusive. He says, for instance, that we laugh at love and amatory adventures because they abound in deceptions! But deception always implies ignorance or falsity, and the extravagant phraseology of love, the fanciful names, the griefs and ecstasies, are not only

ridiculous in themselves, but lead us to regard lovers generally as bereft of reason.

Dumont observes, in support of his theory, that "when a small man bobs his head in passing under a door, we laugh." But if a puppet or a pantaloon were to do so we should scarcely be amused, for we could account for it, and see nothing wrong in his action. He goes on to ask how the other view is applicable in the case of Ariosto's father, who rates his son at the very moment when the latter is wanting a model of an enraged parent to complete his comedy. It is our general idea that the anger of a father is something alarming and painful to endure, but here we see it regarded as a most fortunate occurrence. The man is producing the contrary effect to what he supposes, he is not effecting what he is intending; here is a strange kind of failure or ignorance. Suppose we had known that the father was only simulating anger, we should probably not have laughed, or if we were amused, it would be at Ariosto's expense, who was being deceived in his model of parental indignation.

Léon Dumont defines the laughable to be that of which the mind is forced to affirm and to deny the same thing at the same time. He attributes it to two distant ideas being brought together. We might thus conclude that there

was something droll in such expressions as "eyes of fire," "lips of dew."

Everyone is aware that humour is generally evanescent, the feeling goes almost as soon as it arrives; and the same spell, if repeated, has lost its charm. It may be said that all repetition is, in its nature, wearisome, because it is not in accordance with the progress of the human mind, but we must admit that it is less damaging to poetry in which there is a perpetual spring and rebirth, and to proverbs which have ever fresh and useful application.

"Nothing," writes Amelot, "pleases less than a perpetual pleasantry," and we all know that a jest-book is dull reading. Humour seems the more fugitive, because we do not know by what means to reproduce and continue it. We can, almost at will, call up emotions of love, hatred or sorrow, and when we feel them we can aggravate them to any extent, but humour is not thus under our command. We cannot invent or summon it. When we have heard a "good thing" said, we shall find that the mere repetition of the words originally uttered are more fully successful in reproducing and prolonging our mirth than all the attempts we usually make to develop it and come closer to the point. Sydney Smith was of opinion that much might be effected by perseverance,

and this is the reason that he was often guilty of that bad and overstrained wit which led Lord Brougham to call him "too much of a Jack pudding."

We cannot by calculation and design produce anything worthy of the name of humour. It is generally true that any kind of reflection is inimical to it. But no doubt the great cause of its evanescence is that it leads to nothing, and adds nothing to our information. The most fleeting humour is that which is on unimportant subjects, as in comic poems and squibs, which may show considerable ingenuity, but have no interest. It is the nugatory and negative character of humour that makes it so short-lived. Hence, also, it is best at intervals, and in small quantities. The fact that when any attempt is made to explain a jest and glean any information from it the humour vanishes, seems much opposed to its containing any principle of rebirth.

Many of the philosophers, who have discarded the idea of there being condemnation in the ludicrous, have been misled either by not distinguishing between the ludicrous and the gift of humour, or by regarding the grain of truth which is imbedded in all wit as the entire or principal cause of our amusement. To form the complication necessary for humorous say-

ings there must be, of course, some element of truth to oppose the falsity in them. The course in forming witty sayings is generally the following. We remark some real resemblance between things which has hitherto been unnoticed. We then, upon this foundation, make a false statement, deriving so much colour from the truth that we cannot easily disengage one from the other. The resemblance must be something striking and unusual, or it would not support a statement which opposes our ordinary experience. As in the ludicrous there is reality, so in humour there must be some element of truth, or we should regard the invention as simple falsehood. To this extent we are prepared to agree with Boileau that "the basis of all wit is truth," but the result and general impression it gives is falsity.

Addison's Genealogy of Humour :—

Truth	
Good Sense	
Wit	Mirth
Humour	

at first seems to be erroneous, but he does not really mean to say that there is no falsehood in it, but that it does not approach nonsense, and often contains useful instruction.

Holms exhibits the nature of humour in a passage remarkable for philosophy and elegance :

"There is a perfect consciousness in every kind of wit that its essence consists in a partial and incomplete view of whatever it touches. It throws a single ray separated from the rest, red, yellow, blue, or any intermediate shade upon an object, never white light. We get beautiful effects from wit, all the prismatic colours, but never the object is in fair daylight. Poetry uses the rainbow tints for special effects, but always its essential object is the purest white light of truth."

Bacon went further, and considered that even the beauty of poetry and the pleasures of imagination were derived from falsehood.

"This truth is a naked and open daylight, which doth not show the masques and mummeries and triumphs of the world half so stately and daintily as candle light. Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl that showeth well by day, but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle that shineth best in varied lights. A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure. Doth any man doubt that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imagination, and the like, but that it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things full of melancholy indisposition, and displeasing to themselves."

Mr. Dallas goes so far as to say that "it is impossible that laughter should be an unmixed pleasure, seeing it arises from some aspect of imperfection or discordance." The fact that many people would undergo almost any kind of suffering rather than be exposed to ridicule, indicates that it contains some very unpleasant reflection. We sometimes feel uncomfortable even when we hear laughter around us, the cause of which we do not know, fearing that we may be ourselves the object of it—even dogs dislike to be laughed at. Our ordinary modes of speech seem to point to some imperfection

or error in humour, as when we say "there is many a true word spoken in jest," or "life is a jest," signifying its unreality. Sometimes we say that an observation "must be a joke," implying that it is false. I have even heard of a man who never laughed at humour because he hated falsehood, and we sometimes say of an untrue statement that it must be taken with a "grain of salt."

It is so very common for men to flinch under ridicule, that it is said to be a good test of courage. An old English poet says,

"For he who does not tremble at the sword,  
Who quails not with his head upon the block,  
Turn but a jest against him, loses heart.  
The shafts of wit slip through the stoutest mail;  
There is no man alive that can live down  
The unextinguishable laughter of mankind."

Aristotle defines the ludicrous to be "a certain error and turpitude unattended with pain, and not destructive," a statement which may refer to moral or physical defects. Cicero and Quintilian, looking probably at satire, consider it to be mostly directed against the shortcomings and offences of men. Bacon in his "*Silva Silvarum*" says the objects of laughter are deformity, absurdity, and misfortune, in which we trace a certain severity, although he speaks of "jocular arts" as "deceptions of the senses," such as in masks, and other exhibitions, were much in fashion in his day. Descartes says



that we only laugh at those whom we deem worthy of reproach ; but Marmontel, the celebrated pupil of Voltaire, takes a view which bespeaks greater cultivation and a progress in society. "A fault in manner," he says, "is laughable ; a false pretension is ridiculous, a situation which exposes vice to detestation is comic, a *bon mot* is pleasant."

Dugald Stewart proceeds so far as almost to exclude vice, for he only specifies "slight imperfections in the character and manners, such as do not excite any moral indignation." He says that it is especially excited by affectation, hypocrisy, and vanity.

We trace in these successive opinions of philosophers an improvement in humour, proportionate to the progress of mankind. As men of literature, they drew general conclusions, and from the higher and more cultivated classes, probably much from books. Had they taken a wider range, their catalogues would have been more comprehensive.

But the amelioration we have traced is as much in the general tone of feeling as in humour itself, if not more. Bitter reflections upon the personal or moral defects of others are not so acceptable now as formerly ; the "glorying" over the downfall of our neighbours is less common.

Thus we mark an improvement in the sentiments which accompany the ludicrous, and which many philosophers seem to have mistaken for the ludicrous itself. Neither hostility, indelicacy, nor profanity can create the ludicrous, but where they do not disgust they vivify and make it more effective. It will be observed that in all of them there is something we condemn and disapprove. The joy of gain and advantage was in very early times sufficient to quicken humour in that childlike mirth which flowed chiefly from delight and exultation, but the "laughter of pleasure" has passed away, perhaps we require something more keen or subtle in the maturer age of the world. The accessory emotions are not at present either so joyous or so offensive as they were in bygone times. The "faults in manners" of Marmontel, and the "slight imperfections" of Dugald Stewart, showed that the objectionable stimulants of the ludicrous were assuming a much milder form.

From the views of Archbishop Whately set forth in his "Logic," we might suppose that pleasantries, although not devoid of falsity, were usually of a truly innocuous character—"Jests," he writes, "are mock fallacies, *i.e.* fallacies so palpable as not to be able to deceive anyone, but yet bearing just the resemblance of argument

which is calculated to amuse by contrast." Farther on we read again : " There are several different kind of jokes and raillery, which will be found to correspond with the different kinds of fallacy." On this we may observe that some jests, generally of the "manufactured" class, are founded on a false logical process, but in most cases the error arises more from the matter than from the form, and often from mistakes of the senses. Although nearly every misconception may be represented under the form of false ratiocination, the imperfection almost always lies in one of the premises, and it is seldom that there is plainly a fault of argument in humour. If we claim everything as a fallacy of which there is no evidence, though there seems to be some, we shall embrace a large area—part of which is usually assigned to falsity, and if we consider every mistake to come from wrong deduction, we shall convict mankind of being so full of fallacies as not to be a rational, but a most illogical animal. Whately says, " The pun is evidently in most instances a mock argument founded on a palpable equivocation of the middle term—and others in like manner will be found to correspond to the respective fallacies."

A pun is the nearest approach to a mere mock fallacy of form, and we see what poor

amusement it generally affords. To feign that because words have the same sound, they convey the same thoughts or meanings is a fiction as transparent as it is preposterous. A word is nothing but an arbitrary sign, and apart from the thought connected with it, it is an empty unmeaning sound. The link is too slight in puns, the disparity between the things they represent as similar, too great—there is too much falsity. The worst kind of them is where the words are unlike in spelling, and even somewhat so in sound, and where the same reference cannot be made to suit both. Such are puns of the “atrocious” or “villainous” class—a fertile source of bad riddles. For instance, “Why is an old shoe like ancient Greece?” “Because it had a sole on (Solon).” Here the words are very dissimilar and the allusion is imperfect—the description of an old shoe being wrong and forced.

The founders of many of our great families have shown how much this kind of humour was once appreciated by using it in their mottoes. Thus Onslow has “*Festina lente*” and Vernon more happily “*Ver non semper floret*.” Some puns are amusingly ingenious when the reference hinges well on both words, some additional verbal or other connection is shown, and the words are exactly

alike. When there are not two words, but one is used in two senses, there is still greater improvement. Thus the Rev. R. S. Hawker—a man of such mediæval tastes that he was claimed, falsely, I believe, as a Roman Catholic—made an apt reply to a nobleman who had told him in the heat of religious controversy that he would not be priest-ridden—

“Priest-ridden thou! it cannot be  
By prophet or by priest,  
Balaam is dead, and none but he  
Would choose thee for his beast!”

We also consider that the mendicant deserved a coin, who, knowing the love of wit in Louis XIV., complained sadly to him, *Ton image est partout—excepté dans ma poche*. In such cases the pun is sometimes transformed, for it only invariably exists where the words are equivocal and where the allusion is peculiarly applicable to the double meaning the falsity vanishes, and the verbal coincidence becomes an effective ornament of style. It has been so used by the most successful writers, and it is still under certain conditions approved; but more discrimination is required in such embellishments than was anciently necessary. And when the allusion becomes not only elegant but iridescent, reflecting beautiful and changing lights, it rises into poetical metaphor.

Falsity is necessary to constitute a pun; if no

great identity is assumed between the two words, and they are not introduced in a somewhat strained manner, we do not consider the term applicable. If the use of merely similar words in sentences were to be so viewed, we should be constantly guilty of punning. Wordsworth was not guilty of a pun on that hot day in Germany when, his friends having given him some hock, a wine he detested, he exclaimed :

“In Spain, that land of priests and apes  
The thing called wine doth come from grapes,  
But where flows down the lordly Rhine  
The thing called *gripes* doth come from wine.”

No doubt he intended to show a coincidence in coupling together two words of nearly the same sound, but he represented the two things signified as cause and effect, not as identical, so as to form a pun.

The difference between poetical and humorous comparisons may be generally stated to be that the former are upward towards something superior, the latter downwards towards something inferior. Tennyson calls Maud a “queen rose,” and when we sing—

“Happy fair,  
Thine eyes are load stars, and thy tongue sweet air,”

the comparison is inspiring, but, when Washington Irving speaks of a “vinegar-faced woman,” we feel inclined to laugh. There are, however,

exceptions to this rule. Socrates says that to compare a man to everything excellent is to insult him. Sometimes also a dwarf is compared to a giant for the purpose of calling attention to his insignificance. This is often seen in irony. So also, we at times laugh at the sagacity shown by the lower animals, which seems not so much to raise them in our estimation as to lower them by occasioning a comparison with the superior powers of man.

Sometimes in comparisons between things very different, we cannot say one thing is not as good as another, but, with regard to a certain use, purpose, or design, there may be an evident inferiority. Thus comparisons are so often odious, that Wordsworth speaks of the blessing of being able to look at the world without making them. We may observe generally that when an idea is brought before us, which, instead of elevating and enlarging our previous conception, clashes and jangles with it, there is an approach towards the laughable.

We cannot say that enthusiasm in Art or Science should not exist, and yet a manifestation of it seems absurd when we do not sympathise in it. The most amiable and beneficent of men, it has been remarked, "have always been a favourite subject of ridicule for the satirist and jester."

Personal deformities seem absurd to some, but those who have made them their study see nothing extraordinary in them. Sometimes our laughter shows us that something seems wrong, which our highest ideal would approve. I remember seeing an aged man tottering along a rough road in France, with a heavy bag of geese on his back. One of his countrymen, who by the way have not too much reverence for age, came behind him and jovially exclaimed. "*Courage, mon ami, vous êtes sur le chemin de Paradis.*" The old man ought to have been glad to have been on the road to heaven, but our laughter reminds us that most would prefer to stay on earth.

It must be admitted that our feelings with regard to right and wrong are very shifting and changeable, and that we condemn others for doing what we should ourselves have done under the same circumstances. We have also an especial tendency to adopt the view that what we are accustomed to is right. We sometimes observe this in morals, where it causes a considerable amount of confusion, but it holds greater sway over such light matters as awaken the sense of the ludicrous. When anything is presented to us different from what we have been long accustomed to, unless it is evidently better, we are inclined to consider it worse. In the same way, things which at first we consider



wrong, we finally come to think unobjectionable.

In taste and our sense of the ludicrous, we find ourselves greatly under the influence of habit. What seems to be a logical error is often found to be merely something to which we are unaccustomed; thus the double negative, which sounds to us absurd and equivalent to an affirmation, is used in many languages merely to give emphasis.

How ridiculous do the manners of our forefathers now seem, their pig-tails, powder, and patches, the large fardingales, and the stiff and pompous etiquette. I remember a gentleman, a staunch admirer of the old school, who, lamenting over the lounging and lolling of the present day, said' that his grandmother, even when dying, refused to relax into a recumbent posture. She was sitting erect even to her very last hour, and when the doctor suggested to her that she would find herself easier in a reposing posture, she replied, "No, sir, I prefer to die as I am," and she breathed her last, sitting bolt upright in her high-backed chair. So great indeed is the power of custom that it almost leads us to view artificial things as natural productions—to commit as great an error as that of the African King who said that "England must be a fine country, where the rivers flow with rum."

Speaking theoretically, we may say that the opposition of either custom or morale is sufficient to extinguish the ludicrous, and that we do not laugh at what is wrong if we are used to it; or at what is unusual if we think it right. When there is a collision, we may regard the two as neutralizing each other. Still, for this to hold good, neither must predominate, and it will practically be found from the constitution of our minds, a small amount of custom will overcome a considerable amount of morale. In illustration of the above remarks, we might appropriately refer to those strange articles of wearing apparel called hats, the shape of which might suggest to those unaccustomed to them, that we were carrying some culinary utensil upon our head; and yet, if we saw a gentleman walking about bare-headed, like the Ancients, we should feel inclined to laugh.\* But we will rather consider the recent fashion of wearing expanded dresses—those extraordinary “evening bells” which, until lately, occupied so much public attention, and consumed so many tons of iron. An octogenarian who could remember the tight skirts at the end of Queen Charlotte’s reign, and had

\* That the present style of men’s dress is unbecoming strikes us forcibly when we see it reproduced in statues, where we are not used to it.

formed his taste upon that model, might have laughed heartily, if not too much offended at the change. But by degrees, custom would have asserted its sway to such an extent that, although he did not approve of them, they would not provoke his mirth; and yet, when he saw some of the ladies re-introducing tight dresses, he might not be able to laugh at them, as he still retained his early notions with regard to their propriety. But most of us are so influenced by the fashion of the day in dress, that the rights of the case would not have prevented our laughing at the shrimp-like appearance of those who first tried to bring in the present reform, and perhaps some of the stanch supporters of the more natural style could not have quite maintained their gravity, had one of their antiquated ideals been suddenly introduced among the wide-spreading ladies of the late period.

To take another illustration. It would perhaps be in accordance with our highest desires that instinct should approach to reason as nearly as possible, and that all animals should act in the most judicious and beneficial way. Naturalists would be inclined to agree in this, and if this were the view we adopted, we should not laugh at dogs showing signs of intelligence; neither should we at their acting irrationally,

because experience teaches us that they are not generally guided by reflection. But most of us are accustomed to consider reason the prerogative and peculiarity of man. And if we take the view that the lower animals have it not, we shall be inclined to smile when any of them show traces of it—any such exhibition seeming out of place, and leading us to compare them with men. But when we are accustomed to see a monkey taking off his hat, or playing a tambourine, or even smoking a pipe, we by degrees see nothing laughable in the performance.

As our emotions are only excited with reference to human affairs, some have thought that all laughter must refer to them. Pope says, "Laughter implies censure, inanimate and irrational beings are not objects of censure, and may, therefore, be elevated as much as you please, and no ridicule follows." Addison writes to the same purpose. His words are:—"I am afraid I shall appear too abstract in my speculations if I shew that when a man of wit makes us laugh, it is by betraying some address or infirmity in his own character, or in the representation he makes of others, and that when we laugh at a brute, or even at an inanimate thing, it is by some action or incident that bears a remote analogy to some blunder

or absurdity in reasonable creatures." It may be questioned whether we always go so far as to institute this comparison. Ludicrous events and circumstances seem often such as the individuals concerned have no control over whatever, and betray no infirmity. When we see a failure in a work of art, do we always think of the artist? A lady told me last autumn that when she was walking in a country town with her Italian greyhound, which was dressed in a red coat to protect it from cold, the tradespeople and most others passed it without notice, or merely with a passing word of commendation; but, on meeting a country bumpkin, he pointed to it, burst out laughing, and said, "Look at that daug, why, it's all the world like a littl' oss." Beattie thinks that the derision is not necessarily aimed at human beings, and probably it is not directly, but indirectly there seems to be some reference to man. Léon Dumont tells us that he once laughed on hearing a clap of thunder; it was in winter, and it seemed out of place that it should occur in cold weather. There can be nothing legitimately ludicrous in such occurrences. But, perhaps, *lusus naturæ* are not regarded as truly natural. Of course, they are really so, but not to us, for we have an ideal variously obtained of how Nature ought to act, and thus a man is able for

the moment to imagine that something produced by Nature is not natural—just as we sometimes speak of “unnatural weather.” But we seldom or ever laugh at such phenomena.

We all have a certain resemblance to the old Athenians in wishing to hear something new. It generally pleases, and always impresses us. Novelty is in proportion to our ignorance, and can scarcely be said to exist at all absolutely, for although there is some change always in progress, it advances too slowly and certainly to produce anything startling or exciting. Novelty especially affects us with regard to the ludicrous, and some have, therefore, hastily concluded that it is sufficient to awaken this feeling.

The strength and vividness of new emotions and impressions are especially traceable in their outward demonstrative. A very slight change occurring suddenly will often cause an ejaculation of alarm or admiration, especially among those of nervous temperament; but upon a repetition the excitement is less, and the nerves are scarcely affected. This peculiar law of the nervous system will account for the absence of laughter on the relation of any old or well-known story. Both pleasure and facial action are absent; but when we no longer feel

the emotion of humour, we still have some notion that certain ideas awakened it, and would still do so under favourable circumstances,—that is when persons first conceived them. Here then we can recognise humour apart from novelty; but it is dead, its magic is no more. On the same principle, to laugh before telling a good story lessens its force, just as to break gradually melancholy tidings enables the recipient to bear them better. But nothing so effectually damps mirth as to premise that we are going to say something very laughable. Bacon observes, "*Ipsa titillatio si præmoneas non magnopere in risum valet.*" Novelty is necessary to produce what Akenside felicitously calls "the gay surprise," but they are wrong who maintain that this is the essence of the ludicrous. An ingenious suggestion has been made that the reason why we cannot endure the repetition of a humorous story is that on a second relation the element of falsehood becomes too strong in proportion to that of truth. Such an explanation can scarcely be correct, for in many instances people would not be able to show what was the falsity contained. A man may often form a correct judgment as to the general failure of an attempt, without being able to show how it could be corrected. Probably after having

heard a humorous story once we are prepared for something whimsical, and are therefore less affected on its repetition.

We have already observed that certain emotions and states of mind are adverse to the ludicrous, and we now pass on to those which, like novelty, are favourable to it and have been at times considered elements of the ludicrous, but are really only concomitant and accessory. As we have observed, indelicacy, profanity, or a hostile joy at the downfall or folly of others is not in itself humorous. Pleasantry without pungent seasoning may be seen in those "facetious" verbal conceits which our American cousins, and especially "yours trooly," Artemus Ward, have been fond of framing. But accessory emotions are necessary to render humour demonstrative. They are generally unamiable, censorious, or otherwise offensive, perhaps in keeping with the disapproval excited by falsity. In some cases the two feelings of wrong are almost inextricably connected, but in others we can separate them without much difficulty.

In the following instances the presence of an accessory emotion can easily be traced:—

" 'What have you brought me there?' asks a French publisher of a young author, who advances with a long roll under his arm. 'Is



it a manuscript?' 'No, Sir,' replies the man of letters, pompously, 'a fortune!' 'Oh, a fortune! Take it to the publisher opposite, he is poorer than I am.'"

(The disappointment of the author here adds considerably to our amusement at the ingenious answer of the publisher.)

Two men, attired as a bishop and chaplain, entered one of the great jewellery establishments in Bond Street and asked to be shown some diamond rings. The bishop selected one worth a hundred pounds, but said he had only a fifty-pound note with him, and that he wished to take the ring away. The foreman took the note, and the bishop gave his address; but he had scarcely left when a policeman rushed in and asked where the two swindlers had gone. The foreman stood aghast, but said he had at least secured a fifty-pound note. The policeman asked to see it, and saying it was a flash note and that he would have it tested, left the shop and never returned.

The amusement afforded by practical jokes is also largely dependent upon the discomfort of the victims. This kind of humour, happily now little known in this country, has been much in favour with Italian bandits, who occasionally unite whimsical fancy with great personal daring. A Piedmontese gentleman

told me an instance in which two Counts, who were dining at an albergo, met a strange-looking man whom they took to be a sportsman like themselves. The conversation turned upon bandits, and the Counts expressed a hope that they might meet some, as they were well armed and would teach them a lesson. Their companion left before them, and walking along the road they were to take, ordered a labouring man whom he met to stand in an adjoining vineyard and hold up a vine-stake to his shoulder like a gun. As soon as the Counts' carriage came to the place the bandit rushed out, seized the horses, and called upon the Counts to deliver up their arms or he would order his men, whom they could see in the vineyard, to fire. The Counts not only obeyed the summons, but began to accuse one another of keeping something back. Shortly afterwards, on a doctor boasting in the same way, the bandit went out before him and stuck a bough in the road on which he hung a lantern. The doctor called out who's there? and was taking a deadly aim with his gun, when he was seized from behind and pinioned. The bandit said he should teach him a different lesson from that he deserved, and only deprived him of his gun.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

Nomenclature—Three Classes of Words—Distinction between Wit and Humour—Wit sometimes dangerous, generally innocuous.

THE subject of which we have been treating in these volumes will suggest to us the logical distinctions to be drawn between three classes of words. First, we have those which imply that we are regarding something external, awakening laughter as the *ludicrous* from *ludus*, a game, especially pointing to antics and gambols ; the *ridiculous* from *rideo* to laugh, referring to that which occasions a demonstrative movement in the muscles of the countenance—implying a strong emotion, often of contempt, and generally applied to persons, as the ludicrous is to circumstances ; the *grotesque* referring to strangeness in form, such as is seen in fantastic *grottoes*, or in the quaint figures of sylvan deities which the Ancients placed in them, and the *absurd*, properly referring to acts of people who are defective in faculties.

The ludicrous is often used in philosophical

works to signify a feeling, and our second class will contain words which may refer either to something external or to the mind, such as *droll*, (from the German) *comical*, *amusing*, and *funny*. To say "I do not see any fun in it," is different from saying "I do not see any fun in him," and a man may be called funny, either in laudation or disparagement.

In the third class we place such words as refer to the mind alone as the source of amusement, and under this head we may place Humour as a general and generic term. Rail-ery and sarcasm (from a Greek word "to tear flesh") refer especially to the expression of the feeling in language, and irony from its covert nature generally requires assistance from the voice and manner. Some words refer especially to literature, and never to any attacks made on present company. Of these, satire aims at making a man odious or ridiculous; lampoon, contemptible. Satire is the rapier; lampoon the broadsword, or even the cudgel—the former points to the heart and wounds sharply, the latter deals a dull and blundering blow, often falling wide of the mark. In general a different man selects a different weapon; the educated and refined preferring satire; the rude and more vulgar, lampoon—one adopting what is keen and precise, the

other seeking rough and irrelevant accessories. But clever men, to gain others over to them by amusement, have sometimes taken the clumsier means, and while placing their victim nearer the level of the brutes than of humanity, have not struck so straight; for the improbability they have introduced has in it so much that is fantastic that their attack seems mostly playful, if not bordering on the ludicrous.

Lampoon was the earliest kind of humorous invective; we have an instance of it in Homer's Thersites. Buffoonery differs from lampoon in being carried on in acting, instead of words. The latter is rather based upon some moral delinquency or imperfection; the former aims merely at amusement, and resembles burlesque in being generally optical, and containing little malice. Both come under the category of broad humour, which is excessive in accessory emotion, and in most cases deficient in complication. Caricature resembles them both in being often concerned with deformity. It appeals to the senses rather than to the emotions. The complication in it is never very good when it is confined to pictorial representation, as we may observe that without some explanation we should seldom know what a design was intended to portray; and when the word means description in writing it still retains some of its original

reference to sight, and is concerned principally with form and optical similitudes.

Although Wit and Humour are often used as synonymous, the fact of two words being in use, and the attempts which have been made to discriminate between them, prove that there must be a distinction in signification.\* It is so fine that many able writers have failed to detect it. Lord Macaulay considered wit to refer to contrasts sought for, humour to those before our eyes—but such an explanation is not altogether satisfactory. Humour originally meant moisture, or any limpid subtle fluid, and so came to signify the disposition or turn of the mind—just as spirit, originally breath or wind, came to signify the soul of man. In Ben Jonson's time it had this signification, as in one of his plays entitled "Every Man in his Humour." Dispositions being very different, it came to signify fancy—as where Burton, author of the "Anatomy of Melancholy," is called humorous—and also the whimsical Sir W. Thornhill in the "Vicar of Wakefield"—and finally meant the feeling which appreciates the ludicrous, though we sometimes use the old sense in speaking of a good-humoured man.

\* Cicero uses two corresponding words *cavillatio* and *dicacitas*, the former signifying continuous, the latter aphoristic humour.

Wit is a Saxon word, and originally signified Wisdom—a witte was a wise man, and the Saxon Parliament was called the Wittenagemot. We may suppose that wisdom did not then so much imply learning as natural sagacity, and came to refer to such ingenious attempts as those in the Exeter Book. Here would be a basis for the later meaning, especially if some of the old saws came to be regarded as ludicrous, but for a long time afterwards wit signified talent, whether humorous or otherwise, and as late as Elizabeth the “ wits ” were often used as synonymous with judgment. Steele, introducing Pope’s “ Messiah ” in the Spectator, says that it is written by a friend of his “ who is not ashamed to employ his wit in the praise of of his Maker.” Addison introduced the word genius, and the other was relegated to humorous conceits—a change no doubt facilitated by the short and monosyllabic form and sound. The word *facetous* seems to have undergone the same transition in Latin, for Horace speaks of Virgil having possessed the *facetum* in poetry.

Humour may be dry—may consist of subtle inuendoes of a somewhat uncertain character not devoid of pleasantry, perhaps, but indistinctly felt, and not calculated to raise laughter. This has led some to observe that in contradistinction to it—“ Wit is sharply defined like a crystal.”

So Mr. Dallas writes, "Wit is of the known and definite; humour is of the unknown and indefinable. Wit is the unexpected exhibition of some clearly defined contrast or disproportion; humour the unexpected indication of a vague discordance, in which the sense or the perception of ignorance is prominent." "Wit is the comedy of knowledge, humour of ignorance." But we must observe in opposition to this view that humour may be too clearly defined, as in puns or caricatures, it may be broad—but who ever heard of broad wit. The retort often made by those who have been severely hit, "You're very witty," or "You think you're very witty," could not be expressed by, "You're very humorous," which would have neither irony nor point, not implying any pretension. Nothing that smells of the lamp, or refers much to particular experience, or second-hand information, deserves the name of wit, and although it may be recorded in writing, it generally implies impromptu speech. There seems to be a kind of inspiration in it, and we are inclined to regard it, like any other great advantage, as a natural gift. "If you have real wit," says Lord Chesterfield, "it will grow spontaneously, and you need not aim at it, for in that case the rule of the gospel is reversed and it will prove, 'Seek, and ye shall not find.'"



Thus, we speak of a man's mother wit, *i.e.* innate, but we do not call a story witty, as much in it is due to circumstances, and does not necessarily flow from talent. To speak of a woman as "of great wit and beauty" is to pay a high compliment to her mental as well as personal charms.

As wit must be always intellectual it must be in words, and hence as well as because it must imply impromptu talent, the comic situations of a farce or pantomime are not witty. When Poole represents Paul Pry as peeping through a gimlet hole, as attacked with a red hot poker, or blown out of a closet full of fireworks, and where Douglas Jerrold on the Bridge of Ludgate makes the innkeeper tell Charles II., in his disguise, all the bad stories he has heard about his Majesty, we merely see the humour, unless we are so far abstracted as to regard the scene as ludicrous. In the same way a conversation between foolish men on the stage may be amusing, but cannot be witty.

An old stanza tells us—

"True wit is like the brilliant stone  
Dug from the Indian mine.  
Which boasts two various powers in one  
To cut as well as shine."

Bacon observes that those who make others afraid of their wit had need be afraid of others' memory. And Sterne says that there is as great

a difference between the memory of jester and jestee as between the purse of the mortgager and mortgagee. Humour is fully as unamiable as wit, but the latter has obtained the worse character simply because it is the more salient of the two. There is always a jealous and ill-natured side to human nature which gives a semblance of truth to Rochefoucauld's saying that we are not altogether grieved at the misfortunes even of our friends; and wit often, from its point and the element of truth it possesses, has been used to add a sting and adhesiveness to malevolent attacks. Writers therefore often remind us to be sparing and circumspect in the use of wit, as if it were necessarily, instead of accidentally offensive.

As an instance of the danger of wit, I may mention a case in which two celebrated divines, one of the "high" church, and the other of the "broad" church school, had been attacking and confuting one another in rival reviews. They met accidentally at an evening party, and the high churchman, who was a well-known wit, could not forbear exclaiming, as he grasped the other's hand, "The Augurs have met face to face"—an observation which, if it implied anything, must have meant that they were both hypocrites.

Those who consider humour objectionable, have no idea of the variety of circumstances

under which our emotions may be excited. A man may smile at his own misfortunes after they are over—sometimes our laughter seems scarcely directed against anyone, and in the most profane and indelicate humour there is often nothing personal.

Occasionally it is too general to wound, being aimed at nations, as in my old friend's saying, "The French do not know what they want, and will never be satisfied until they get it," or it may strike at the great mass of mankind, as when one of the same dissatisfied nation calls marriage "a tiresome book with a very fine preface." There is nothing unamiable in Goldsmith's reflection upon the rustic simplicity of the villagers, when he says of the schoolmaster—

"And still the wonder grew,  
How one small head could carry all he knew."

Again, we may ask, what person can be possibly injured by most of the humorous stories in which our Transatlantic cousins delight, such as that an American, describing a severe winter said, "Why I had a cow on my farm up the Hudson river, and she got in among the ice, and was carried down three miles before we could get her out again. And what do you suppose has been the consequence? why, she has milked nothing but ice-cream ever since."

How little of the humour, which is always floating around and makes life and society enjoyable, ever gives pain to anybody ; how few men there really are who, as it is said, would rather lose a friend than a joke. Most strokes are directed against imaginary persons, it is generally recognised that what seems wrong to one may seem right to another, and no man of common honesty can deny that he has often ridiculed others for faults which he would have committed himself. This confession might be well made by the most of our humorists.

But although humour should not be offensive, it would be wrong to consider that its proper duty is to inculcate virtue. This is no more its office than it is that of a novel to give sage advice, or of a poem to teach science. Herein Addison's excellent feelings seem to have led him astray, for speaking of false humour he says that " it is all one to it whether it exposes vice and folly, luxury and avarice, or, on the contrary, virtue and wisdom, pain and poverty." From what he says, we might conclude that true humour was that which attacks vice, and false that which makes against virtue. But although it is good to have a worthy object, this has nothing to do with the quality of humour. We have less enjoyment of ridicule when it is directed against a virtuous man, but we also feel

little when the principal element in it is moral instruction.

There is no reason why we should view laughter at what is ludicrous as something objectionable. The more intelligent portion of the civilised world is not now amused at the real sufferings or misfortunes of others. If a man be run over in the street, and have his leg broken, we all sympathise with him. But some pains which have no serious result are still treated with levity, such as those of a gouty foot, of the extraction of a tooth, or of little boys birched at school.

The actions of people in pain are strange and abnormal, and sometimes seem unaccountable; it is not the mere suffering at which any are amused. We can sometimes laugh at a person, although we feel for him, where the incentive to mirth is much stronger than the call for sympathy. Still we confess that some of the old malice lingers among us, some skulking cruelty peeps out at intervals. Fiendish laughter has departed with the Middle Ages, but what delights the schoolboy more than the red-hot poker in the pantomime?

Wit is chiefly to be recommended as a source of enjoyment; to many this will seem no great or legitimate object, for we cannot help drawing a very useful distinction between pleasure and profit. The lines,

“ There are whom heaven has blessed with store of wit  
Yet want as much again to manage it ;  
For wit and judgment ever are at strife,  
Though meant, each others, and like man and wife,”

teach us that talent of this kind may be often turned into a fruitful channel. The politician can by humour influence his audience ; the man of society can make himself popular, and perhaps without this recommendation would never have had an opportunity of gaining his knowledge of the world. When by some happy turn of thought we are successful in raising a laugh, we seem to receive a kind of ovation, the more valuable because sincere. We are allowed a superiority, we have achieved a victory, though it may be but momentary and unimportant.

In daily life our sense of the ludicrous leads us to mark many small errors and blemishes, which we should have overlooked had it not given us pleasure to notice them, and thus from observing the failures of others we learn to correct our own. Much that would be offensive, if not injurious, is thus avoided, and those little angles are removed which obstruct the onward course of society. A sensible man will gain more by being ridiculed than praised, just as adverse criticism, when judicious, ought to raise rather than depress. Lever remarks, with regard to acquiring languages, that “ as

the foreigner is too polite to laugh, the stranger has little chance to learn." A compendium of humorous sayings would, if rightly read, give a valuable history of our shortcomings in the different relations of life. Louis XII., when urged to punish some insolent comedian, replied, "No, no ; in the course of their ribaldry they may sometimes tell us useful truths ; let them amuse themselves, provided they respect the ladies."

Finally, what presage can we form of the future from the experience of the past? We may expect the augmenting emotion in humour to become less, and of a more æsthetical character, indelicacy, profanity, and hostility have been considerably modified even since the commencement of this century. Humour will, by degrees, become more intellectual and more refined, less dependent upon the senses and passions. At some time far hence allusions will be greatly appreciated, the complexity of which our obtuser faculties would now be unable to understand. Still, as keen and excellent wit is a rare gift, some even of the ancient sayings will doubtless survive.

By some, humour has been called a " morbid secretion," and its extinction has been foretold, but history, the only unerring guide, teaches us that it will increase in amount and improve

in quality. Man cannot exist without emotion, and as we have seen various forms and subjects of humour successively arising, so we may be sure in future ages fresh fields for it will be constantly opening. When we consider how necessary amusement is to all, and how bounteously it has been supplied by Providence, we shall feel certain that man will always have beside him this light, which although it cannot lead as a star, can still brighten his path and cheer his spirits upon the pilgrimage of life.

END.



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